Odd Craft

W·W·JACOBS·

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ODD CRAFT

BOOKS BY W. W. JACOBS

ILLUSTRATED BY WILL OWEN

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ODD CRAFT

BY

W. W. JACOBS

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
NEW YORK :::::::::::::::: 1913

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To

MY FRIEND

JEROME K. JEROME

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THE MONEY-BOX

WILL OWEN

THE MONEY-BOX

SAILORMEN are not good 'ands at saving money as a rule, said the night-watchman, as he wistfully toyed with a bad shilling on his watch-chain, though to 'ear 'em talk of saving when they're at sea and there isn't a pub within a thousand miles of 'em, you might think different.

It ain't for the want of trying either with some of 'em, and I've known men do all sorts o' things as soon as they was paid off, with a view to saving. I knew one man as used to keep all but a shilling or two in a belt next to 'is skin so that he couldn't get at it easy, but it was all no good. He was always running short in the most inconvenient places. I've seen 'im wriggle for five minutes right off, with a tramcar conductor standing over 'im and the other people in the tram reading their papers with one eye and watching him with the other.

Ginger Dick and Peter Russet—two men I've spoke of to you afore—tried to save their money once. They'd got so sick and tired of spending it all in p'r'aps a week or ten days arter coming ashore, and 'aving to go to sea agin sooner than they 'ad

intended, that they determined some way or other to 'ave things different.

They was homeward bound on a steamer from Melbourne when they made their minds up; and Isaac Lunn, the oldest fireman aboard—a very steady old teetotaler—gave them a lot of good advice about it. They all wanted to rejoin the ship when she sailed agin, and 'e offered to take a room ashore with them and mind their money, giving 'em what 'e called a moderate amount each day.

They would ha' laughed at any other man, but they knew that old Isaac was as honest as could be and that their money would be safe with 'im, and at last, after a lot of palaver, they wrote out a paper saying as they were willing for 'im to 'ave their money and give it to 'em bit by bit, till they went to sea agin.

Anybody but Ginger Dick and Peter Russet or a fool would ha' known better than to do such a thing, but old Isaac 'ad got such a oily tongue and seemed so fair-minded about wot 'e called moderate drinking that they never thought wot they was letting themselves in for, and when they took their pay—close on sixteen pounds each—they put the odd change in their pockets and 'anded the rest over to him.

The first day they was as pleased as Punch. Old Isaac got a nice, respectable bedroom for them all,

and arter they'd 'ad a few drinks they humoured 'im by 'aving a nice 'ot cup o' tea, and then goin' off with 'im to see a magic-lantern performance.

It was called "The Drunkard's Downfall," and it begun with a young man going into a nice-looking pub and being served by a nice-looking barmaid with a glass of ale. Then it got on to 'arf pints and pints in the next picture, and arter Ginger 'ad seen the lost young man put away six pints in about 'arf a minute, 'e got such a raging thirst on 'im that 'e couldn't sit still, and 'e whispered to Peter Russet to go out with 'im.

"You'll lose the best of it if you go now," ses old Isaac, in a whisper; "in the next picture there's little frogs and devils sitting on the edge of the pot as 'e goes to drink."

Ginger Dick got up and nodded to Peter.

"Arter that 'e kills 'is mother with a razor," ses old Isaac, pleading with 'im and 'olding on to 'is coat.

Ginger Dick sat down agin, and when the murder was over 'e said it made 'im feel faint, and 'im and Peter Russet went out for a breath of fresh air. They 'ad three at the first place, and then they moved on to another and forgot all about Isaac and the dissolving views until ten o'clock, when Ginger, who 'ad been very liberal to some friends 'e'd made in a pub, found 'e'd spent 'is last penny.

"This comes o' listening to a parcel o' teetotalers,"

'e ses, very cross, when 'e found that Peter 'ad spent all 'is money too. "Here we are just beginning the evening and not a farthing in our pockets."

They went off 'ome in a very bad temper. Old Isaac was asleep in 'is bed, and when they woke 'im up and said that they was going to take charge of their money themselves 'e kept dropping off to sleep agin and snoring that 'ard they could scarcely hear themselves speak. Then Peter tipped Ginger a wink and pointed to Isaac's trousers, which were 'anging over the foot of the bed.

Ginger Dick smiled and took 'em up softly, and Peter Russet smiled too; but 'e wasn't best pleased to see old Isaac a-smiling in 'is sleep, as though 'e was 'aving amusing dreams. All Ginger found was a ha'-penny, a bunch o' keys, and a cough lozenge. In the coat and waistcoat 'e found a few tracks folded up, a broken pen-knife, a ball of string, and some other rubbish. Then 'e set down on the foot o' their bed and made eyes over at Peter.

"Wake 'im up agin," ses Peter, in a temper.

Ginger Dick got up and, leaning over the bed, took old Isaac by the shoulders and shook 'im as if 'e'd been a bottle o' medicine.

"Time to get up, lads?" ses old Isaac, putting one leg out o' bed.

"No, it ain't," ses Ginger, very rough; "we ain't been to bed yet. We want our money back."

Isaac drew 'is leg back into bed agin. "Goo' night," he ses, and fell fast asleep.

"He's shamming, that's wot 'e is," ses Peter Russet. "Let's look for it. It must be in the room somewhere."

They turned the room upside down pretty near, and then Ginger Dick struck a match and looked up the chimney, but all 'e found was that it 'adn't been swept for about twenty years, and wot with temper and soot 'e looked so frightful that Peter was arf afraid of 'im.

"I've 'ad enough of this," ses Ginger, running up to the bed and 'olding his sooty fist under old Isaac's nose. "Now, then, where's that money? If you don't give us our money, our 'ard-earned money, inside o' two minutes, I'll break every bone in your body."

"This is wot comes o' trying to do you a favour, Ginger," ses the old man, reproachfully.

"Don't talk to me," ses Ginger, "cos I won't have it. Come on; where is it?"

Old Isaac looked at 'im, and then he gave a sigh and got up and put on 'is boots and 'is trousers.

"I thought I should 'ave a little trouble with you," he ses, slowly, "but I was prepared for that."

"You'll 'ave more if you don't hurry up," ses Ginger, glaring at 'im.

"We don't want to 'urt you, Isaac," ses Peter Russet, "we on'y want our money."

"I know that," ses Isaac; "you keep still, Peter, and see fair-play, and I'll knock you silly arterwards."

He pushed some o' the things into a corner and then 'e spat on 'is 'ands, and began to prance up and down, and duck 'is 'ead about and hit the air in a way that surprised 'em.

"I ain't hit a man for five years," 'e ses, still dancing up and down—"fighting's sinful except in a good cause—but afore I got a new 'art, Ginger, I'd lick three men like you afore breakfast, just to git up a appetite."

"Look 'ere," ses Ginger; "you're an old man and I don't want to 'urt you; tell us where our money is, our 'ard-earned money, and I won't lay a finger on you."

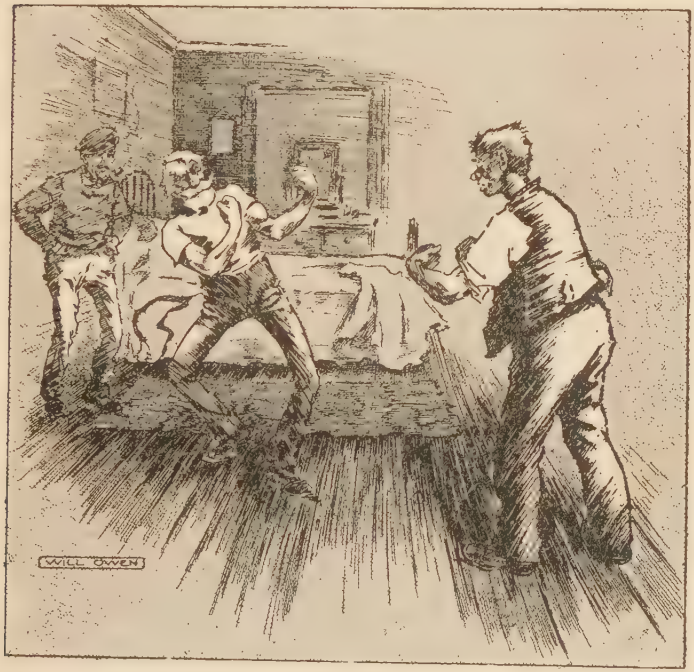
"I'm taking care of it for you," ses the old man.

Ginger Dick gave a howl and rushed at him, and the next moment Isaac's fist shot out and give 'im a drive that sent 'im spinning across the room until 'e fell in a heap in the fireplace. It was like a kick from a 'orse, and Peter looked very serious as 'e picked 'im up and dusted 'im down.

"You should keep your eye on 'is fist," he ses, sharply.

It was a silly thing to say, seeing that that was just

wot 'ad 'appened, and Ginger told 'im wot 'e'd do for 'im when 'e'd finished with Isaac. He went at the old man agin, but 'e never 'ad a chance, and in



" 'I ain't hit a man for five years,' he ses."

about three minutes 'e was very glad to let Peter 'elp 'im into bed.

"It's your turn to fight him now, Peter," he ses. "Just move this piller so as I can see."

"Come on, lad," ses the old man.

Peter shook 'is 'ead. "I have no wish to 'urt you, Isaac," he ses, kindly; "excitement like fighting is dangerous for an old man. Give us our money and we'll say no more about it."

"No, my lads," ses Isaac. "I've undertook to take charge o' this money and I'm going to do it; and I 'ope that when we all sign on aboard the *Planet* there'll be a matter o' twelve pounds each left. Now, I don't want to be 'arsh with you, but I'm going back to bed, and if I 'ave to get up and dress agin you'll wish yourselves dead."

He went back to bed agin, and Peter, taking no notice of Ginger Dick, who kept calling 'im a coward, got into bed alongside of Ginger and fell fast asleep.

They all 'ad breakfast in a coffee-shop next morning, and arter it was over Ginger, who 'adn't spoke a word till then, said that 'e and Peter Russet wanted a little money to go on with. He said they preferred to get their meals alone, as Isaac's face took their appetite away.

"Very good," ses the old man. "I don't want to force my company on nobody," and after thinking 'ard for a minute or two he put 'is 'and in 'is trouser-pocket and gave them eighteen-pence each.

"Wot's this for?" ses Ginger, staring at the money. "Matches?"

"That's your day's allowance," ses Isaac, "and it's

plenty. There's ninepence for your dinner, fourpence for your tea, and twopence for a crust o' bread and cheese for supper. And if you must go and drown

" 'Wot's this for?' ses Ginger."

yourselves in beer, that leaves threepence each to go and do it with."

Ginger tried to speak to 'im, but 'is feelings was

too much for 'im, and 'e couldn't. Then Peter Russet swallered something 'e was going to say and asked old Isaac very perlite to make it a quid for *'im* because he was going down to Colchester to see 'is mother, and 'e didn't want to go empty-'anded.

"You're a good son, Peter," ses old Isaac, "and I wish there was more like you. I'll come down with you, if you like; I've got nothing to do."

Peter said it was very kind of 'im, but 'e'd sooner go alone, owing to his mother being very shy afore strangers.

"Well, I'll come down to the station and take a ticket for you," ses Isaac.

Then Peter lost 'is temper altogether, and banged 'is fist on the table and smashed 'arf the crockery. He asked Isaac whether 'e thought 'im and Ginger Dick was a couple o' children, and 'e said if 'e didn't give 'em all their money right away 'e'd give 'im in charge to the first policeman they met.

"I'm afraid you didn't intend for to go and see your mother, Peter," ses the old man.

"Look 'ere," ses Peter, "are you going to give us that money?"

"Not if you went down on your bended knees," ses the old man.

"Very good," says Peter, getting up and walking outside; "then come along o' me to find a policeman."

"I'm agreeable," ses Isaac, "but I've got the paper you signed."

Peter said 'e didn't care twopence if 'e'd got fifty papers, and they walked along looking for a policeman, which was a very unusual thing for them to do.

"I 'ope for your sakes it won't be the same policeman that you and Ginger Dick set on in Gun Alley the night afore you shipped on the *Planet,*" ses Isaac, pursing up 'is lips.

"'Tain't likely to be," ses Peter, beginning to wish 'e 'adn't been so free with 'is tongue.

"Still, if I tell 'im, I dessay he'll soon find 'im," ses Isaac; "there's one coming along now, Peter; shall I stop 'im?"

Peter Russet looked at 'im and then he looked at Ginger, and they walked by grinding their teeth. They stuck to Isaac all day, trying to get their money out of 'im, and the names they called 'im was a surprise even to themselves. And at night they turned the room topsy-turvy agin looking for their money and 'ad more unpleasantness when they wanted Isaac to get up and let 'em search the bed.

They 'ad breakfast together agin next morning and Ginger tried another tack. He spoke quite nice to Isaac, and 'ad three large cups o' tea to show 'im 'ow 'e was beginning to like it, and when the old man gave 'em their eighteen-pences 'e smiled and said 'e'd like a few shillings extra that day.

"It'll be all right, Isaac," he ses. "I wouldn't 'ave a drink if you asked me to. Don't seem to care for it now. I was saying so to you on'y last night, wasn't I, Peter?"

"You was," ses Peter; "so was I."

"Then I've done you good, Ginger," ses Isaac, clapping 'im on the back.

"You 'ave," ses Ginger, speaking between his teeth, "and I thank you for it. I don't want drink; but I thought o' going to a music-'all this evening."

"Going to *wot?*" ses old Isaac, drawing 'imself up and looking very shocked.

"A music-'all," ses Ginger, trying to keep 'is temper.

"A music-'all," ses Isaac; "why, it's worse than a pub, Ginger. I should be a very poor friend o' yours if I let you go there—I couldn't think of it."

"Wot's it got to do with you, you gray-whiskered serpent?" screams Ginger, arf mad with rage. "Why don't you leave us alone? Why don't you mind your own business? It's our money."

Isaac tried to talk to 'im, but 'e wouldn't listen, and he made such a fuss that at last the coffee-shop keeper told 'im to go outside. Peter follered 'im out, and being very upset they went and spent their day's allowance in the first hour, and then they walked about the streets quarrelling as to the death they'd like old Isaac to 'ave when 'is time came.

They went back to their lodgings at dinner-time; but there was no sign of the old man, and, being 'ungry and thirsty, they took all their spare clothes to a pawnbroker and got enough money to go on with. Just to show their independence they went to two music-'alls, and with a sort of idea that they was doing Isaac a bad turn they spent every farthing afore they got 'ome, and sat up in bed telling 'im about the spree they'd 'ad.

At five o'clock in the morning Peter woke up and saw, to 'is surprise, that Ginger Dick was dressed and carefully folding up old Isaac's clothes. At first 'e thought that Ginger 'ad gone mad, taking care of the old man's things like that, but afore 'e could speak Ginger noticed that 'e was awake, and stepped over to 'im and whispered to 'im to dress without making a noise. Peter did as 'e was told, and, more puzzled than ever, saw Ginger make up all the old man's clothes in a bundle and creep out of the room on tiptoe.

"Going to 'ide 'is clothes?" 'e ses.

"Yes," ses Ginger, leading the way downstairs; "in a pawnshop. We'll make the old man pay for to-day's amusements."

Then Peter see the joke and 'e begun to laugh so 'ard that Ginger 'ad to threaten to knock 'is head off to quiet 'im. Ginger laughed 'imself when they got outside, and at last, arter walking about till the

shops opened, they got into a pawnbroker's and put old Isaac's clothes up for fifteen shillings.

"They put old Isaac's clothes up for fifteen shillings."

First thing they did was to 'ave a good breakfast, and after that they came out smiling all over and

began to spend a 'appy day. Ginger was in tip-top spirits and so was Peter, and the idea that old Isaac was in bed while they was drinking 'is clothes pleased them more than anything. Twice that evening policemen spoke to Ginger for dancing on the pavement, and by the time the money was spent it took Peter all 'is time to get 'im 'ome.

Old Isaac was in bed when they got there, and the temper 'e was in was shocking; but Ginger sat on 'is bed and smiled at 'im as if 'e was saying compliments to 'im.

"Where's my clothes?" ses the old man, shaking 'is fist at the two of 'em.

Ginger smiled at 'im; then 'e shut 'is eyes and dropped off to sleep.

"Where's my clothes?" ses Isaac, turning to Peter.

"Closhe?" ses Peter, staring at 'im.

"Where are they?" ses Isaac.

It was a long time afore Peter could understand wot 'e meant, but as soon as 'e did 'e started to look for 'em. Drink takes people in different ways, and the way it always took Peter was to make 'im one o' the most obliging men that ever lived. He spent arf the night crawling about on all fours looking for the clothes, and four or five times old Isaac woke up from dreams of earthquakes to find Peter 'ad got jammed under 'is bed, and was wondering what 'ad 'appened to 'im.

None of 'em was in the best o' tempers when they woke up next morning, and Ginger 'ad 'ardly got 'is eyes open before Isaac was asking 'im about 'is clothes agin.

"Don't bother me about your clothes," ses Ginger; "talk about something else for a change."

"Where are they?" ses Isaac, sitting on the edge of 'is bed.

Ginger yawned and felt in 'is waistcoat pocket—for neither of 'em 'ad undressed—and then 'e took the pawn-ticket out and threw it on the floor. Isaac picked it up, and then 'e began to dance about the room as if 'e'd gone mad.

"Do you mean to tell me you've pawned my clothes?" he shouts.

"Me and Peter did," ses Ginger, sitting up in bed and getting ready for a row.

Isaac dropped on the bed agin all of a 'eap. "And wot am I to do?" he ses.

"If you be'ave yourself," ses Ginger, "and give us our money, me and Peter'll go and get 'em out agin. When we've 'ad breakfast, that is. There's no hurry."

"But I 'aven't got the money," ses Isaac; "it was all sewn up in the lining of the coat. I've on'y got about five shillings. You've made a nice mess of it, Ginger, you 'ave."

"You're a silly fool, Ginger, that's wot you are," ses Peter.

"Sewn up in the lining of the coat?" ses Ginger, staring.

"The bank-notes was," ses Isaac, "and three pounds in gold 'idden in the cap. Did you pawn that too?"

Ginger got up in 'is excitement and walked up and down the room. "We must go and get 'em out at once," he ses.

"And where's the money to do it with?" ses Peter.

Ginger 'adn't thought of that, and it struck 'im all of a heap. None of 'em seemed to be able to think of a way of getting the other ten shillings wot was wanted, and Ginger was so upset that 'e took no notice of the things Peter kept saying to 'im.

"Let's go and ask to see 'em, and say we left a railway-ticket in the pocket," ses Peter.

Isaac shook 'is 'ead. "There's on'y one way to do it," he ses. "We shall 'ave to pawn your clothes, Ginger, to get mine out with."

"That's the on'y way, Ginger," ses Peter, brightening up. "Now, wot's the good o' carrying on like that? It's no worse for you to be without your clothes for a little while than it was for pore old Isaac."

It took 'em quite arf an hour afore they could get Ginger to see it. First of all 'e wanted Peter's clothes to be took instead of 'is, and when Peter pointed out that they was too shabby to fetch ten

shillings 'e 'ad a lot o' nasty things to say about wearing such old rags, and at last, in a terrible temper, 'e took 'is clothes off and pitched 'em in a 'eap on the floor.

"If you ain't back in arf an hour, Peter," 'e ses, scowling at 'im, "you'll 'ear from me, I can tell you."

"Don't you worry about that," ses Isaac, with a smile. "*I'm* going to take 'em."

"You?" ses Ginger; "but you can't. You ain't got no clothes."

"I'm going to wear Peter's," ses Isaac, with a smile.

Peter asked 'im to listen to reason, but it was all no good. He'd got the pawn-ticket, and at last Peter, forgetting all he'd said to Ginger Dick about using bad langwidge, took 'is clothes off, one by one, and dashed 'em on the floor, and told Isaac some of the things 'e thought of 'im.

The old man didn't take any notice of 'im. He dressed 'imself up very slow and careful in Peter's clothes, and then 'e drove 'em nearly crazy by wasting time making 'is bed.

"Be as quick as you can, Isaac," ses Ginger, at last; "think of us two a-sitting 'ere waiting for you."

"I sha'n't forget it," ses Isaac, and 'e came back to the door after 'e'd gone arf-way down the stairs

to ask 'em not to go out on the drink while 'e was away.

It was nine o'clock when he went, and at ha'-past nine Ginger began to get impatient and wondered wot 'ad 'appened to 'im, and when ten o'clock came and no Isaac they was both leaning out of the winder with blankets over their shoulders looking up the road. By eleven o'clock Peter was in very low spirits and Ginger was so mad 'e was afraid to speak to 'im.

They spent the rest o' that day 'anging out of the winder, but it was not till ha'-past four in the afternoon that Isaac, still wearing Peter's clothes and carrying a couple of large green plants under 'is arm, turned into the road, and from the way 'e was smiling they thought it must be all right.

"Wot 'ave you been such a long time for?" ses Ginger, in a low, fierce voice, as Isaac stopped underneath the winder and nodded up to 'em.

"I met a old friend," ses Isaac.

"Met a old friend?" ses Ginger, in a passion. "Wot d'ye mean, wasting time like that while we was sitting up 'ere waiting and starving?"

"I 'adn't seen 'im for years," ses Isaac, "and time slipped away afore I noticed it."

"I dessay," ses Ginger, in a bitter voice. "Well, is the money all right?"

"I don't know," ses Isaac; "I ain't got the clothes."

"Wot?" ses Ginger, nearly falling out of the winder. "Well, wot 'ave you done with mine, then? Where are they? Come upstairs."

"I won't come upstairs, Ginger," ses Isaac, "because I'm not quite sure whether I've done right. But I'm not used to going into pawnshops, and I walked about trying to make up my mind to go in and couldn't."

"Well, wot did you do then?" ses Ginger, 'ardly able to contain hisself.

"While I was trying to make up my mind," ses old Isaac, "I see a man with a barrer of lovely plants. 'E wasn't asking money for 'em, only old clothes."

"Old clothes?" ses Ginger, in a voice as if 'e was being suffocated.

"I thought they'd be a bit o' green for you to look at," ses the old man, 'olding the plants up; "there's no knowing 'ow long you'll be up there. The big one is yours, Ginger, and the other is for Peter."

"'Ave you gone mad, Isaac?" ses Peter, in a trembling voice, arter Ginger 'ad tried to speak and couldn't.

Isaac shook 'is 'ead and smiled up at 'em, and then, arter telling Peter to put Ginger's blanket a little more round 'is shoulders, for fear 'e should catch cold, 'e said 'e'd ask the landlady to send 'em up some bread and butter and a cup o' tea.

They 'eard 'im talking to the landlady at the door,

and then 'e went off in a hurry without looking behind 'im, and the landlady walked up and down on

"Old Isaac kept 'em there for three days."

the other side of the road with 'er apron stuffed in 'er mouth, pretending to be looking at 'er chimney-pots.

Isaac didn't turn up at all that night, and by next morning those two unfortunate men see 'ow they'd been done. It was quite plain to them that Isaac 'ad been deceiving them, and Peter was pretty certain that 'e took the money out of the bed while 'e was fussing about making it. Old Isaac kept 'em there for three days, sending 'em in their clothes bit by bit and two shillings a day to live on; but they didn't set eyes on 'im agin until they all signed on aboard the *Planet,* and they didn't set eyes on their money until they was two miles below Gravesend.

THE CASTAWAY

WILL OWEN

THE CASTAWAY

MRS. JOHN BOXER stood at the door of the shop with her hands clasped on her apron. The short day had drawn to a close, and the lamps in the narrow little thoroughfares of Shinglesea were already lit. For a time she stood listening to the regular beat of the sea on the beach some half-mile distant, and then with a slight shiver stepped back into the shop and closed the door.

The little shop with its wide-mouthed bottles of sweets was one of her earliest memories. Until her marriage she had known no other home, and when her husband was lost with the *North Star* some three years before, she gave up her home in Poplar and returned to assist her mother in the little shop.

In a restless mood she took up a piece of needlework, and a minute or two later put it down again. A glance through the glass of the door leading into the small parlour revealed Mrs. Gimpson, with a red shawl round her shoulders, asleep in her easy-chair.

Mrs. Boxer turned at the clang of the shop bell, and then, with a wild cry, stood gazing at the figure

of a man standing in the door-way. He was short and bearded, with oddly shaped shoulders, and a left leg which was not a match; but the next moment Mrs. Boxer was in his arms sobbing and laughing together.

Mrs. Gimpson, whose nerves were still quivering owing to the suddenness with which she had been awakened, came into the shop; Mr. Boxer freed an arm, and placing it round her waist kissed her with some affection on the chin.

"He's come back!" cried Mrs. Boxer, hysterically.

"Thank goodness," said Mrs. Gimpson, after a moment's deliberation.

"He's alive!" cried Mrs. Boxer. "He's alive!"

She half-dragged and half-led him into the small parlour, and thrusting him into the easy-chair lately vacated by Mrs. Gimpson seated herself upon his knee, regardless in her excitement that the rightful owner was with elaborate care selecting the most uncomfortable chair in the room.

"Fancy his coming back!" said Mrs. Boxer, wiping her eyes. "How did you escape, John? Where have you been? Tell us all about it."

Mr. Boxer sighed. "It 'ud be a long story if I had the gift of telling of it," he said, slowly, "but I'll cut it short for the present. When the *North Star* went down in the South Pacific most o' the hands

got away in the boats, but I was too late. I got this crack on the head with something falling on it from aloft. Look here."

He bent his head, and Mrs. Boxer, separating the stubble with her fingers, uttered an exclamation of pity and alarm at the extent of the scar; Mrs. Gimpson, craning forward, uttered a sound which might mean anything—even pity.

"When I come to my senses," continued Mr. Boxer, "the ship was sinking, and I just got to my feet when she went down and took me with her. How I escaped I don't know. I seemed to be choking and fighting for my breath for years, and then I found myself floating on the sea and clinging to a grating. I clung to it all night, and next day I was picked up by a native who was paddling about in a canoe, and taken ashore to an island, where I lived for over two years. It was right out o' the way o' craft, but at last I was picked up by a trading schooner named the *Pearl,* belonging to Sydney, and taken there. At Sydney I shipped aboard the *Marston Towers,* a steamer, and landed at the Albert Docks this morning."

"Poor John," said his wife, holding on to his arm. "How you must have suffered!"

"I did," said Mr. Boxer. "Mother got a cold?" he inquired, eying that lady.

"No, I ain't," said Mrs. Gimpson, answering for

herself. "Why didn't you write when you got to Sydney?"

"Didn't know where to write to," replied Mr. Boxer, staring. "I didn't know where Mary had gone to."

"You might ha' wrote here," said Mrs. Gimpson.

"Didn't think of it at the time," said Mr. Boxer. "One thing is, I was very busy at Sydney, looking for a ship. However, I'm 'ere now."

"I always felt you'd turn up some day," said Mrs. Gimpson. "I felt certain of it in my own mind. Mary made sure you was dead, but I said 'no, I knew better.' "

There was something in Mrs. Gimpson's manner of saying this that impressed her listeners unfavourably. The impression was deepened when, after a short, dry laugh *à propos* of nothing, she sniffed again—three times.

"Well, you turned out to be right," said Mr. Boxer, shortly.

"I gin'rally am," was the reply; "there's very few people can take me in."

She sniffed again.

"Were the natives kind to you?" inquired Mrs. Boxer, hastily, as she turned to her husband.

"Very kind," said the latter. "Ah! you ought to have seen that island. Beautiful yellow sands and palm-trees; cocoa-nuts to be 'ad for the picking,

and nothing to do all day but lay about in the sun and swim in the sea."

"Any public-'ouses there?" inquired Mrs. Gimpson.

"Cert'nly not," said her son-in-law. "This was an island—one o' the little islands in the South Pacific Ocean."

"What did you say the name o' the schooner was?" inquired Mrs. Gimpson.

"Pearl," replied Mr. Boxer, with the air of a resentful witness under cross-examination.

"And what was the name o' the captin?" said Mrs. Gimpson.

"Thomas—Henery—Walter—Smith," said Mr. Boxer, with somewhat unpleasant emphasis.

"An' the mate's name?"

"John Brown," was the reply.

"Common names," commented Mrs. Gimpson, "very common. But I knew you'd come back all right—*I* never 'ad no alarm. 'He's safe and happy, my dear,' I says. 'He'll come back all in his own good time.' "

"What d'you mean by that?" demanded the sensitive Mr. Boxer. "I come back as soon as I could."

"You know you were anxious, mother," interposed her daughter. "Why, you insisted upon our going to see old Mr. Silver about it."

"Ah! but I wasn't uneasy or anxious afterwards," said Mrs. Gimpson, compressing her lips.

"Who's old Mr. Silver, and what should he know about it?" inquired Mr. Boxer.

"He's a fortune-teller," replied his wife.

"Reads the stars," said his mother-in-law.

Mr. Boxer laughed—a good ringing laugh. "What did he tell you?" he inquired.

"Nothing," said his wife, hastily.

"Ah!" said Mr. Boxer, waggishly, "that was wise of 'im. Most of us could tell fortunes that way."

"That's wrong," said Mrs. Gimpson to her daughter, sharply. "Right's right any day, and truth's truth. He said that he knew all about John and what he'd been doing, but he wouldn't tell us for fear of 'urting our feelings and making mischief."

"Here, look 'ere," said Mr. Boxer, starting up; "I've 'ad about enough o' this. Why don't you speak out what you mean? I'll mischief 'im, the old humbug. Old rascal."

"Never mind, John," said his wife, laying her hand upon his arm. "Here you are safe and sound, and as for old Mr. Silver, there's a lot o' people don't believe in him."

"Ah! they don't want to," said Mrs. Gimpson, obstinately. "But don't forget that he foretold my cough last winter."

"Well, look 'ere," said Mr. Boxer, twisting his

short, blunt nose into as near an imitation of a sneer as he could manage, "I've told you my story and I've got witnesses to prove it. You can write to the master of the *Marston Towers* if you like, and other

" 'Well, look 'ere,' said Mr. Boxer, 'I've told you my story and I've got witnesses to prove it.' "

people besides. Very well, then; let's go and see your precious old fortune-teller. You needn't say who I am; say I'm a friend, and tell 'im never to mind about making mischief, but to say right out

where I am and what I've been doing all this time. I have my 'opes it'll cure you of your superstitiousness."

"We'll go round after we've shut up, mother," said Mrs. Boxer. "We'll have a bit o' supper first and then start early."

Mrs. Gimpson hesitated. It is never pleasant to submit one's superstitions to the tests of the unbelieving, but after the attitude she had taken up she was extremely loath to allow her son-in-law a triumph.

"Never mind, we'll say no more about it," she said, primly, "but I 'ave my own ideas."

"I dessay," said Mr. Boxer; "but you're afraid for us to go to your old fortune-teller. It would be too much of a show-up for 'im."

"It's no good your trying to aggravate me, John Boxer, because you can't do it," said Mrs. Gimpson, in a voice trembling with passion.

"O' course, if people like being deceived they must be," said Mr. Boxer; "we've all got to live, and if we'd all got our common sense fortune-tellers couldn't. Does he tell fortunes by tea-leaves or by the colour of your eyes?"

"Laugh away, John Boxer," said Mrs. Gimpson, icily; "but I shouldn't have been alive now if it hadn't ha' been for Mr. Silver's warnings."

"Mother stayed in bed for the first ten days in

July," explained Mrs. Boxer, "to avoid being bit by a mad dog."

"*Tchee—tchee—tchee,*" said the hapless Mr. Boxer, putting his hand over his mouth and making noble efforts to restrain himself; "*tchee—tch*——"

"I s'pose you'd ha' laughed more if I 'ad been bit?" said the glaring Mrs. Gimpson.

"Well, who did the dog bite after all?" inquired Mr. Boxer, recovering.

"You don't understand," replied Mrs. Gimpson, pityingly; "me being safe up in bed and the door locked, there was no mad dog. There was no use for it."

"Well," said Mr. Boxer, "me and Mary's going round to see that old deceiver after supper, whether you come or not. Mary shall tell 'im I'm a friend, and ask him to tell her everything about 'er husband. Nobody knows me here, and Mary and me'll be affectionate like, and give 'im to understand we want to marry. Then he won't mind making mischief."

"You'd better leave well alone," said Mrs. Gimpson.

Mr. Boxer shook his head. "I was always one for a bit o' fun," he said, slowly. "I want to see his face when he finds out who I am."

Mrs. Gimpson made no reply; she was looking round for the market-basket, and having found it she left the reunited couple to keep house while she

went out to obtain a supper which should, in her daughter's eyes, be worthy of the occasion.

She went to the High Street first and made her purchases, and was on the way back again when, in response to a sudden impulse, as she passed the end of Crowner's Alley, she turned into that small by-way and knocked at the astrologer's door.

A slow, dragging footstep was heard approaching in reply to the summons, and the astrologer, recognising his visitor as one of his most faithful and credulous clients, invited her to step inside. Mrs. Gimpson complied, and, taking a chair, gazed at the venerable white beard and small, red-rimmed eyes of her host in some perplexity as to how to begin.

"My daughter's coming round to see you presently," she said, at last.

The astrologer nodded.

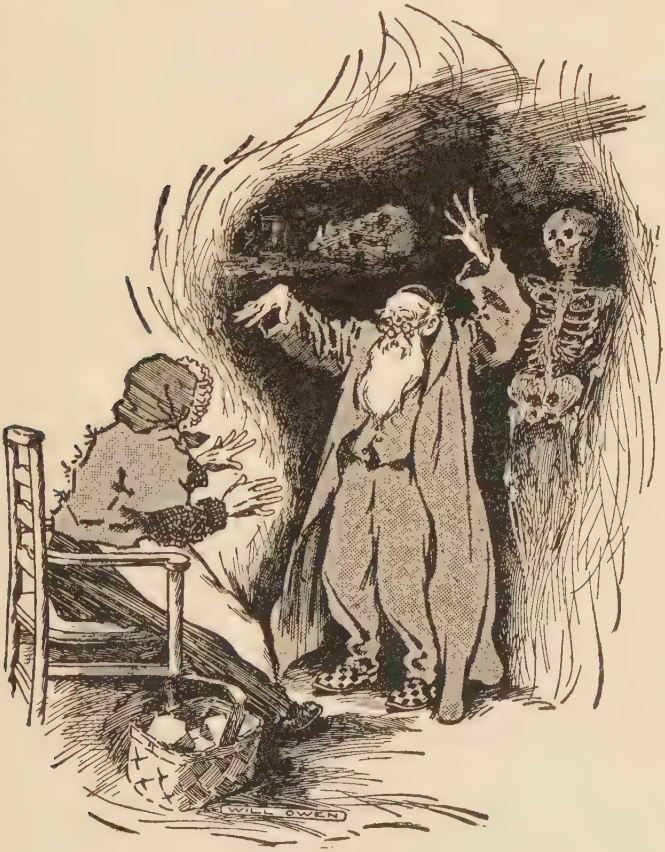
"She—she wants to ask you about 'er husband," faltered Mrs. Gimpson; "she's going to bring a friend with her—a man who doesn't believe in your knowledge. He—he knows all about my daughter's husband, and he wants to see what you say you know about him."

The old man put on a pair of huge horn spectacles and eyed her carefully.

"You've got something on your mind," he said, at last; "you'd better tell me everything."

Mrs. Gimpson shook her head.

"There's some danger hanging over you," continued Mr. Silver, in a low, thrilling voice; "some danger in connection with your son-in-law. There"—



"There is something forming over you."

he waved a lean, shrivelled hand backward and forward as though dispelling a fog, and peered into distance—"there is something forming over you. You—or somebody—are hiding something from me."

Mrs. Gimpson, aghast at such omniscience, sank backward in her chair.

"Speak," said the old man, gently; "there is no reason why you should be sacrificed for others."

Mrs. Gimpson was of the same opinion, and in some haste she reeled off the events of the evening. She had a good memory, and no detail was lost.

"Strange, strange," said the venerable Mr. Silver, when he had finished. "He is an ingenious man."

"Isn't it true?" inquired his listener. "He says he can prove it. And he is going to find out what you meant by saying you were afraid of making mischief."

"He can prove some of it," said the old man, his eyes snapping spitefully. "I can guarantee that."

"But it wouldn't have made mischief if you had told us that," ventured Mrs. Gimpson. "A man can't help being cast away."

"True," said the astrologer, slowly; "true. But let them come and question me; and whatever you do, for your own sake don't let a soul know that you have been here. If you do, the danger to your-

self will be so terrible that even *I* may be unable to help you."

Mrs. Gimpson shivered, and more than ever impressed by his marvellous powers made her way slowly home, where she found the unconscious Mr. Boxer relating his adventures again with much gusto to a married couple from next door.

"It's a wonder he's alive," said Mr. Jem Thompson, looking up as the old woman entered the room; "it sounds like a story-book. Show us that cut on your head again, mate."

The obliging Mr. Boxer complied.

"We're going on with 'em after they've 'ad supper," continued Mr. Thompson, as he and his wife rose to depart. "It'll be a fair treat to me to see old Silver bowled out."

Mrs. Gimpson sniffed and eyed his retreating figure disparagingly; Mrs. Boxer, prompted by her husband, began to set the table for supper.

It was a lengthy meal, owing principally to Mr. Boxer, but it was over at last, and after that gentleman had assisted in shutting up the shop they joined the Thompsons, who were waiting outside, and set off for Crowner's Alley. The way was enlivened by Mr. Boxer, who had thrills of horror every ten yards at the idea of the supernatural things he was about to witness, and by Mr. Thompson, who, not to be outdone, persisted in standing stock-still at fre-

quent intervals until he had received the assurances of his giggling better-half that he would not be made to vanish in a cloud of smoke.

By the time they reached Mr. Silver's abode the party had regained its decorum, and, except for a tremendous shudder on the part of Mr. Boxer as his gaze fell on a couple of skulls which decorated the magician's table, their behaviour left nothing to be desired. Mrs. Gimpson, in a few awkward words, announced the occasion of their visit. Mr. Boxer she introduced as a friend of the family from London.

"I will do what I can," said the old man, slowly, as his visitors seated themselves, "but I can only tell you what I see. If I do not see all, or see clearly, it cannot be helped."

Mr. Boxer winked at Mr. Thompson, and received an understanding pinch in return; Mrs. Thompson in a hot whisper told them to behave themselves.

The mystic preparations were soon complete. A little cloud of smoke, through which the fierce red eyes of the astrologer peered keenly at Mr. Boxer, rose from the table. Then he poured various liquids into a small china bowl and, holding up his hand to command silence, gazed steadfastly into it. "I see pictures," he announced, in a deep voice. "The docks of a great city; London. I see an ill-shaped man with a bent left leg standing on the deck of a ship."

Mr. Thompson, his eyes wide open with surprise, jerked Mr. Boxer in the ribs, but Mr. Boxer, whose figure was a sore point with him, made no response.

"The ship leaves the docks," continued Mr. Silver, still peering into the bowl. "As she passes through the entrance her stern comes into view with the name painted on it. The—the—the——"

"Look agin, old chap," growled Mr. Boxer, in an undertone.

"The *North Star,*" said the astrologer. "The ill-shaped man is still standing on the fore-part of the ship; I do not know his name or who he is. He takes the portrait of a beautiful young woman from his pocket and gazes at it earnestly."

Mrs. Boxer, who had no illusions on the subject of her personal appearance, sat up as though she had been stung; Mr. Thompson, who was about to nudge Mr. Boxer in the ribs again, thought better of it and assumed an air of uncompromising virtue.

"The picture disappears," said Mr. Silver. "Ah! I see; I see. A ship in a gale at sea. It is the *North Star;* it is sinking. The ill-shaped man sheds tears and loses his head. I cannot discover the name of this man."

Mr. Boxer, who had been several times on the point of interrupting, cleared his throat and endeavoured to look unconcerned.

"The ship sinks," continued the astrologer, in

thrilling tones. "Ah! what is this? a piece of wreckage with a monkey clinging to it? No, no-o. The ill-shaped man again. Dear me!"

"Ah! what is this? a piece of wreckage with a monkey clinging to it?"

His listeners sat spellbound. Only the laboured and intense breathing of Mr. Boxer broke the silence.

"He is alone on the boundless sea," pursued the seer; "night falls. Day breaks, and a canoe propelled by a slender and pretty but dusky maiden approaches the castaway. She assists him into the canoe and his head sinks on her lap, as with vigorous strokes of her paddle she propels the canoe toward a small island fringed with palm trees."

"Here, look 'ere—" began the overwrought Mr. Boxer.

"H'sh, h'sh!" ejaculated the keenly interested Mr. Thompson. "W'y don't you keep quiet?"

"The picture fades," continued the old man. "I see another: a native wedding. It is the dusky maiden and the man she rescued. Ah! the wedding is interrupted; a young man, a native, breaks into the group. He has a long knife in his hand. He springs upon the ill-shaped man and wounds him in the head."

Involuntarily Mr. Boxer's hand went up to his honourable scar, and the heads of the others swung round to gaze at it. Mrs. Boxer's face was terrible in its expression, but Mrs. Gimpson's bore the look of sad and patient triumph of one who knew men and could not be surprised at anything they do.

"The scene vanishes," resumed the monotonous voice, "and another one forms. The same man stands on the deck of a small ship. The name on the stern is the *Peer*—no, *Paris*—no, no, no, *Pearl.*

It fades from the shore where the dusky maiden stands with hands stretched out imploringly. The ill-shaped man smiles and takes the portrait of the young and beautiful girl from his pocket."

"Look 'ere," said the infuriated Mr. Boxer, "I think we've 'ad about enough of this rubbish. I have —more than enough."

"I don't wonder at it," said his wife, trembling furiously. "You can go if you like. I'm going to stay and hear all that there is to hear."

"You sit quiet," urged the intensely interested Mr. Thompson. "He ain't said it's you. There's more than one misshaped man in the world, I s'pose?"

"I see an ocean liner," said the seer, who had appeared to be in a trance state during this colloquy. "She is sailing for England from Australia. I see the name distinctly: the *Marston Towers*. The same man is on board of her. The ship arrives at London. The scene closes; another one forms. The ill-shaped man is sitting with a woman with a beautiful face—not the same as the photograph."

"What they can see in him I can't think," muttered Mr. Thompson, in an envious whisper. "He's a perfick terror, and to look at him——"

"They sit hand in hand," continued the astrologer, raising his voice. "She smiles up at him and gently strokes his head; he——"

A loud smack rang through the room and startled

the entire company; Mrs. Boxer, unable to contain herself any longer, had, so far from profiting by the example, gone to the other extreme and slapped her husband's head with hearty good-will. Mr. Boxer sprang raging to his feet, and in the confusion which ensued the fortune-teller, to the great regret of Mr. Thompson, upset the contents of the magic bowl.

"I can see no more," he said, sinking hastily into his chair behind the table as Mr. Boxer advanced upon him.

Mrs. Gimpson pushed her son-in-law aside, and laying a modest fee upon the table took her daughter's arm and led her out. The Thompsons followed, and Mr. Boxer, after an irresolute glance in the direction of the ingenuous Mr. Silver, made his way after them and fell into the rear. The people in front walked on for some time in silence, and then the voice of the greatly impressed Mrs. Thompson was heard, to the effect that if there were only more fortune-tellers in the world there would be a lot more better men.

Mr. Boxer trotted up to his wife's side. "Look here, Mary," he began.

"Don't you speak to me," said his wife, drawing closer to her mother, "because I won't answer you."

Mr. Boxer laughed, bitterly. "This is a nice home-coming," he remarked.

He fell to the rear again and walked along raging,

his temper by no means being improved by observing that Mrs. Thompson, doubtless with a firm belief in the saying that "Evil communications corrupt good manners," kept a tight hold of her husband's arm. His position as an outcast was clearly defined, and he ground his teeth with rage as he observed the virtuous uprightness of Mrs. Gimpson's back. By the time they reached home he was in a spirit of mad recklessness far in advance of the character given him by the astrologer.

His wife gazed at him with a look of such strong interrogation as he was about to follow her into the house that he paused with his foot on the step and eyed her dumbly.

"Have you left anything inside that you want?" she inquired.

Mr. Boxer shook his head. "I only wanted to come in and make a clean breast of it," he said, in a curious voice; "then I'll go."

Mrs. Gimpson stood aside to let him pass, and Mr. Thompson, not to be denied, followed close behind with his faintly protesting wife. They sat down in a row against the wall, and Mr. Boxer, sitting opposite in a hang-dog fashion, eyed them with scornful wrath.

"Well?" said Mrs. Boxer, at last.

"All that he said was quite true," said her husband, defiantly. "The only thing is, he didn't tell

"'Have you left anything inside that you want?' she inquired."

the arf of it. Altogether, I married three dusky maidens."

Everybody but Mr. Thompson shuddered with horror.

"Then I married a white girl in Australia," pur-

sued Mr. Boxer, musingly. "I wonder old Silver didn't see that in the bowl; not arf a fortune-teller, I call 'im."

"What they *see* in 'im!" whispered the astounded Mr. Thompson to his wife.

"And did you marry the beautiful girl in the photograph?" demanded Mrs. Boxer, in trembling accents.

"I did," said her husband.

"Hussy," cried Mrs. Boxer.

"I married her," said Mr. Boxer, considering—"I married her at Camberwell, in eighteen ninety-three."

"Eighteen *ninety-three!*" said his wife, in a startled voice. "But you couldn't. Why, you didn't marry me till eighteen ninety-*four.*"

"What's that got to do with it?" inquired the monster, calmly.

Mrs. Boxer, pale as ashes, rose from her seat and stood gazing at him with horror-struck eyes, trying in vain to speak.

"You villain!" cried Mrs. Gimpson, violently. "I always distrusted you."

"I know you did," said Mr. Boxer, calmly.

"You've been committing bigamy," cried Mrs. Gimpson.

"Over and over agin," assented Mr. Boxer, cheerfully. "It's got to be a 'obby with me."

"Was the first wife alive when you married my daughter?" demanded Mrs. Gimpson.

"Alive?" said Mr. Boxer. "O' course she was. She's alive now—bless her."

" 'You villain!' cried Mrs. Gimpson, violently. 'I always distrusted you.' "

He leaned back in his chair and regarded with intense satisfaction the horrified faces of the group in front.

"You—you'll go to jail for this," cried Mrs.

Gimpson, breathlessly. "What is your first wife's address?"

"I decline to answer that question," said her son-in-law.

"What is your first wife's address?" repeated Mrs. Gimpson.

"Ask the fortune-teller," said Mr. Boxer, with an aggravating smile. "And then get 'im up in the box as a witness, little bowl and all. He can tell you more than I can."

"I demand to know her name and address," cried Mrs. Gimpson, putting a bony arm around the waist of the trembling Mrs. Boxer.

"I decline to give it," said Mr. Boxer, with great relish. "It ain't likely I'm going to give myself away like that; besides, it's agin the law for a man to criminate himself. You go on and start your bigamy case, and call old red-eyes as a witness."

Mrs. Gimpson gazed at him in speechless wrath and then stooping down conversed in excited whispers with Mrs. Thompson. Mrs. Boxer crossed over to her husband.

"Oh, John," she wailed, "say it isn't true, say it isn't true."

Mr. Boxer hesitated. "What's the good o' me saying anything?" he said, doggedly.

"It isn't true," persisted his wife. "Say it isn't true."

"What I told you when I first came in this evening was quite true," said her husband, slowly. "And what I've just told you is as true as what that lying old fortune-teller told you. You can please yourself what you believe."

"I believe you, John," said his wife, humbly.

Mr. Boxer's countenance cleared and he drew her on to his knee.

"That's right," he said, cheerfully. "So long as you believe in me I don't care what other people think. And before I'm much older I'll find out how that old rascal got to know the names of the ships I was aboard. Seems to me somebody's been talking."

BLUNDELL'S IMPROVEMENT

WILL OWEN

BLUNDELL'S IMPROVEMENT

VENIA TURNBULL in a quiet, unobtrusive fashion was enjoying herself. The cool living-room at Turnbull's farm was a delightful contrast to the hot sunshine without, and the drowsy humming of bees floating in at the open window was charged with hints of slumber to the middle-aged. From her seat by the window she watched with amused interest the efforts of her father—kept from his Sunday afternoon nap by the assiduous attentions of her two admirers—to maintain his politeness.

"Father was so pleased to see you both come in," she said, softly; "it's very dull for him here of an afternoon with only me."

"I can't imagine anybody being dull with only you," said Sergeant Dick Daly, turning a bold brown eye upon her.

Mr. John Blundell scowled; this was the third time the sergeant had said the thing that he would have liked to say if he had thought of it.

"I don't mind being dull," remarked Mr. Turnbull, casually.

Neither gentleman made any comment.

"I like it," pursued Mr. Turnbull, longingly; "always did, from a child."

The two young men looked at each other; then they looked at Venia; the sergeant assumed an expression of careless ease, while John Blundell sat his chair like a human limpet. Mr. Turnbull almost groaned as he remembered his tenacity.

"The garden's looking very nice," he said, with a pathetic glance round.

"Beautiful," assented the sergeant. "I saw it yesterday."

"Some o' the roses on that big bush have opened a bit more since then," said the farmer.

Sergeant Daly expressed his gratification, and said that he was not surprised. It was only ten days since he had arrived in the village on a visit to a relative, but in that short space of time he had, to the great discomfort of Mr. Blundell, made himself wonderfully at home at Mr. Turnbull's. To Venia he related strange adventures by sea and land, and on subjects of which he was sure the farmer knew nothing he was a perfect mine of information. He began to talk in low tones to Venia, and the heart of Mr. Blundell sank within him as he noted her interest. Their voices fell to a gentle murmur, and the sergeant's sleek, well-brushed head bent closer to that of his listener. Relieved from his attentions, Mr. Turnbull fell asleep without more ado.

Blundell sat neglected, the unwilling witness of a flirtation he was powerless to prevent. Considering her limited opportunities, Miss Turnbull displayed a proficiency which astonished him. Even the sergeant was amazed, and suspected her of long practice.

"I wonder whether it is very hot outside?" she said, at last, rising and looking out of the window.

"Only pleasantly warm," said the sergeant. "It would be nice down by the water."

"I'm afraid of disturbing father by our talk," said the considerate daughter. "You might tell him we've gone for a little stroll when he wakes," she added, turning to Blundell.

Mr. Blundell, who had risen with the idea of acting the humble but, in his opinion, highly necessary part of chaperon, sat down again and watched blankly from the window until they were out of sight. He was half inclined to think that the exigencies of the case warranted him in arousing the farmer at once.

It was an hour later when the farmer awoke, to find himself alone with Mr. Blundell, a state of affairs for which he strove with some pertinacity to make that aggrieved gentleman responsible.

"Why didn't you go with them?" he demanded.

"Because I wasn't asked," replied the other.

Mr. Turnbull sat up in his chair and eyed him disdainfully. "For a great, big chap like you are,

John Blundell," he exclaimed, "it's surprising what a little pluck you've got."

"I don't want to go where I'm not wanted," retorted Mr. Blundell.

"That's where you make a mistake," said the other, regarding him severely; "girls like a masterful man, and, instead of getting your own way, you sit down quietly and do as you're told, like a tame—tame——"

"Tame what?" inquired Mr. Blundell, resentfully.

"I don't know," said the other, frankly; "the tamest thing you can think of. There's Daly laughing in his sleeve at you, and talking to Venia about Waterloo and the Crimea as though he'd been there. I thought it was pretty near settled between you."

"So did I," said Mr. Blundell.

"You're a big man, John," said the other, "but you're slow. You're all muscle and no head."

"I think of things afterward," said Blundell, humbly; "generally after I get to bed."

Mr. Turnbull sniffed, and took a turn up and down the room; then he closed the door and came toward his friend again.

"I dare say you're surprised at me being so anxious to get rid of Venia," he said, slowly, "but the fact is I'm thinking of marrying again myself."

"You!" said the startled Mr. Blundell.

"Yes, me," said the other, somewhat sharply. "But she won't marry so long as Venia is at home. It's a secret, because if Venia got to hear of it she'd keep single to prevent it. She's just that sort of girl."

Mr. Blundell coughed, but did not deny it. "Who is it?" he inquired.

"Miss Sippet," was the reply. "She couldn't hold her own for half an hour against Venia."

Mr. Blundell, a great stickler for accuracy, reduced the time to five minutes.

"And now," said the aggrieved Mr. Turnbull, "now, so far as I can see, she's struck with Daly. If she has him it'll be years and years before they can marry. She seems crazy about heroes. She was talking to me the other night about them. Not to put too fine a point on it, she was talking about you."

Mr. Blundell blushed with pleased surprise.

"Said you were *not* a hero," explained Mr. Turnbull. "Of course, I stuck up for you. I said you'd got too much sense to go putting your life into danger. I said you were a very careful man, and I told her how particular you was about damp sheets. Your housekeeper told me."

"It's all nonsense," said Blundell, with a fiery face. "I'll send that old fool packing if she can't keep her tongue quiet."

"It's very sensible of you, John," said Mr. Turn-

bull, "and a sensible girl would appreciate it. Instead of that, she only sniffed when I told her how careful you always were to wear flannel next to your skin. She said she liked dare-devils."

"I suppose she thinks Daly is a dare-devil," said the offended Mr. Blundell. "And I wish people wouldn't talk about me and my skin. Why can't they mind their own business?"

Mr. Turnbull eyed him indignantly, and then, sitting in a very upright position, slowly filled his pipe, and declining a proffered match rose and took one from the mantel-piece.

"I was doing the best I could for you," he said, staring hard at the ingrate. "I was trying to make Venia see what a careful husband you would make. Miss Sippet herself is most particular about such things—and Venia seemed to think something of it, because she asked me whether you used a warming-pan."

Mr. Blundell got up from his chair and, without going through the formality of bidding his host good-by, quitted the room and closed the door violently behind him. He was red with rage, and he brooded darkly as he made his way home on the folly of carrying on the traditions of a devoted mother without thinking for himself.

For the next two or three days, to Venia's secret concern, he failed to put in an appearance at the

farm—a fact which made flirtation with the sergeant a somewhat uninteresting business. Her sole recompense was the dismay of her father, and for his bene-

"She asked me whether you used a warming-pan."

fit she dwelt upon the advantages of the Army in a manner that would have made the fortune of a recruiting-sergeant.

"She's just crazy after the soldiers," he said to Mr. Blundell, whom he was trying to spur on to a desperate effort. "I've been watching her close, and I can see what it is now; she's romantic. You're too slow and ordinary for her. She wants somebody more dazzling. She told Daly only yesterday afternoon that she loved heroes. Told it to him to his face. I sat there and heard her. It's a pity you ain't a hero, John."

"Yes," said Mr. Blundell; "then, if I was, I expect she'd like something else."

The other shook his head. "If you could only do something daring," he murmured; "half-kill somebody, or save somebody's life, and let her see you do it. Couldn't you dive off the quay and save somebody's life from drowning?"

"Yes, I could," said Blundell, "if somebody would only tumble in."

"You might pretend that you thought you saw somebody drowning," suggested Mr. Turnbull.

"And be laughed at," said Mr. Blundell, who knew his Venia by heart.

"You always seem to be able to think of objections," complained Mr. Turnbull; "I've noticed that in you before."

"I'd go in fast enough if there was anybody there," said Blundell. "I'm not much of a swimmer, but——"

"All the better," interrupted the other; "that would make it all the more daring."

"And I don't much care if I'm drowned," pursued the younger man, gloomily.

Mr. Turnbull thrust his hands in his pockets and took a turn or two up and down the room. His brows were knitted and his lips pursed. In the presence of this mental stress Mr. Blundell preserved a respectful silence.

"We'll all four go for a walk on the quay on Sunday afternoon," said Mr. Turnbull, at last.

"On the chance?" inquired his staring friend.

"On the chance," assented the other; "it's just possible Daly might fall in."

"He might if we walked up and down five million times," said Blundell, unpleasantly.

"He might if we walked up and down three or four times," said Mr. Turnbull, "especially if you happened to stumble."

"I never stumble," said the matter-of-fact Mr. Blundell. "I don't know anybody more sure-footed than I am."

"Or thick-headed," added the exasperated Mr. Turnbull.

Mr. Blundell regarded him patiently; he had a strong suspicion that his friend had been drinking.

"Stumbling," said Mr. Turnbull, conquering his annoyance with an effort—"stumbling is a thing that

might happen to anybody. You trip your foot against a stone and lurch up against Daly; he tumbles overboard, and you off with your jacket and dive in off the quay after him. He can't swim a stroke."

Mr. Blundell caught his breath and gazed at him in speechless amaze.

"There's sure to be several people on the quay if it's a fine afternoon," continued his instructor. "You'll have half Dunchurch round you, praising you and patting you on the back—all in front of Venia, mind you. It'll be put in all the papers and you'll get a medal."

"And suppose we are both drowned?" said Mr. Blundell, soberly.

"Drowned? Fiddlesticks!" said Mr. Turnbull. "However, please yourself. If you're afraid——"

"I'll do it," said Blundell, decidedly.

"And mind," said the other, "don't do it as if it's as easy as kissing your fingers; be half-drowned yourself, or at least pretend to be. And when you're on the quay take your time about coming round. Be longer than Daly is; you don't want him to get all the pity."

"All right," said the other.

"After a time you can open your eyes," went on his instructor; "then, if I were you, I should say, 'Good-bye, Venia,' and close 'em again. Work it up affecting, and send messages to your aunts."

"It sounds all right," said Blundell.

"It *is* all right," said Mr. Turnbull. "That's just the bare idea I've given you. It's for you to improve upon it. You've got two days to think about it."

Mr. Blundell thanked him, and for the next two days thought of little else. Being a careful man he made his will, and it was in a comparatively cheerful frame of mind that he made his way on Sunday afternoon to Mr. Turnbull's.

The sergeant was already there conversing in low tones with Venia by the window, while Mr. Turnbull, sitting opposite in an oaken armchair, regarded him with an expression which would have shocked Iago.

"We were just thinking of having a blow down by the water," he said, as Blundell entered.

"What! a hot day like this?" said Venia.

"I was just thinking how beautifully cool it is in here," said the sergeant, who was hoping for a repetition of the previous Sunday's performance.

"It's cooler outside," said Mr. Turnbull, with a wilful ignoring of facts; "much cooler when you get used to it."

He led the way with Blundell, and Venia and the sergeant, keeping as much as possible in the shade of the dust-powdered hedges, followed. The sun was blazing in the sky, and scarce half-a-dozen people were to be seen on the little curved quay which constituted the usual Sunday afternoon promenade. The

water, a dozen feet below, lapped cool and green against the stone sides.

At the extreme end of the quay, underneath the lantern, they all stopped, ostensibly to admire a full-rigged ship sailing slowly by in the distance, but really to effect the change of partners necessary to the afternoon's business. The change gave Mr. Turnbull some trouble ere it was effected, but he was successful at last, and, walking behind the two young men, waited somewhat nervously for developments.

Twice they paraded the length of the quay and nothing happened. The ship was still visible, and, the sergeant halting to gaze at it, the company lost their formation, and he led the complaisant Venia off from beneath her father's very nose.

"You're a pretty manager, you are, John Blundell," said the incensed Mr. Turnbull.

"I know what I'm about," said Blundell, slowly.

"Well, why don't you do it?" demanded the other. "I suppose you are going to wait until there are more people about, and then perhaps some of them will see you push him over."

"It isn't that," said Blundell, slowly, "but you told me to improve on your plan, you know, and I've been thinking out improvements."

"Well?" said the other.

"It doesn't seem much good saving Daly," said Blundell; "that's what I've been thinking. He would

be in as much danger as I should, and he'd get as much sympathy; perhaps more."

"Do you mean to tell me that you are backing out of it?" demanded Mr. Turnbull.

"'Bah! you are backing out of it,' said the irritated Mr. Turnbull."

"No," said Blundell, slowly, "but it would be much better if I saved somebody else. I don't want Daly to be pitied."

"Bah! you are backing out of it," said the irritated Mr. Turnbull. "You're afraid of a little cold water."

"No, I'm not," said Blundell; "but it would be better in every way to save somebody else. She'll see Daly standing there doing nothing, while I am struggling for my life. I've thought it all out very carefully. I know I'm not quick, but I'm sure, and when I make up my mind to do a thing, I do it. You ought to know that."

"That's all very well," said the other; "but who else is there to push in?"

"That's all right," said Blundell, vaguely. "Don't you worry about that; I shall find somebody."

Mr. Turnbull turned and cast a speculative eye along the quay. As a rule, he had great confidence in Blundell's determination, but on this occasion he had his doubts.

"Well, it's a riddle to me," he said, slowly. "I give it up. It seems— *Halloa!* Good heavens, be careful. You nearly had *me* in then."

"Did I?" said Blundell, thickly. "I'm very sorry."

Mr. Turnbull, angry at such carelessness, accepted the apology in a grudging spirit and trudged along in silence. Then he started nervously as a monstrous and unworthy suspicion occurred to him. It was an incredible thing to suppose, but at the same time he felt that there was nothing like being on the safe side, and in tones not quite free from significance he

intimated his desire of changing places with his awkward friend.

"It's all right," said Blundell, soothingly.

"I know it is," said Mr. Turnbull, regarding him fixedly; "but I prefer this side. You very near had me over just now."

"I staggered," said Mr. Blundell.

"Another inch and I should have been overboard," said Mr. Turnbull, with a shudder. "That would have been a nice how d'ye do."

Mr. Blundell coughed and looked seaward. "Accidents will happen," he murmured.

They reached the end of the quay again and stood talking, and when they turned once more the sergeant was surprised and gratified at the ease with which he bore off Venia. Mr. Turnbull and Blundell followed some little way behind, and the former gentleman's suspicions were somewhat lulled by finding that his friend made no attempt to take the inside place. He looked about him with interest for a likely victim, but in vain.

"What are you looking at?" he demanded, impatiently, as Blundell suddenly came to a stop and gazed curiously into the harbour.

"Jelly-fish," said the other, briefly. "I never saw such a monster. It must be a yard across."

Mr. Turnbull stopped, but could see nothing, and even when Blundell pointed it out with his finger he

had no better success. He stepped forward a pace, and his suspicions returned with renewed vigour as a hand was laid caressingly on his shoulder. The next moment, with a wild shriek, he shot suddenly over the edge and disappeared. Venia and the sergeant, turning hastily, were just in time to see the fountain which ensued on his immersion.

"Oh, save him!" cried Venia.

The sergeant ran to the edge and gazed in helpless dismay as Mr. Turnbull came to the surface and disappeared again. At the same moment Blundell, who had thrown off his coat, dived into the harbour and, rising rapidly to the surface, caught the fast-choking Mr. Turnbull by the collar.

"Keep still," he cried, sharply, as the farmer tried to clutch him; "keep still or I'll let you go."

"Help!" choked the farmer, gazing up at the little knot of people which had collected on the quay.

A stout fisherman who had not run for thirty years came along the edge of the quay at a shambling trot, with a coil of rope over his arm. John Blundell saw him and, mindful of the farmer's warning about kissing of fingers, etc., raised his disengaged arm and took that frenzied gentleman below the surface again. By the time they came up he was very glad for his own sake to catch the line skilfully thrown by the old fisherman and be drawn gently to the side.

"With a wild shriek he shot suddenly over the edge."

"I'll tow you to the steps," said the fisherman; "don't let go o' the line."

Mr. Turnbull saw to that; he wound the rope round his wrist and began to regain his presence of mind as they were drawn steadily toward the steps. Willing hands drew them out of the water and helped them up on to the quay, where Mr. Turnbull, sitting in his own puddle, coughed up salt water and glared ferociously at the inanimate form of Mr. Blundell. Sergeant Daly and another man were rendering what they piously believed to be first aid to the apparently drowned, while the stout fisherman, with both hands to his mouth, was yelling in heart-rending accents for a barrel.

"He—he—push—pushed me in," gasped the choking Mr. Turnbull.

Nobody paid any attention to him; even Venia, seeing that he was safe, was on her knees by the side of the unconscious Blundell.

"He—he's shamming," bawled the neglected Mr. Turnbull.

"Shame!" said somebody, without even looking round.

"He pushed me in," repeated Mr. Turnbull. "He pushed me in."

"Oh, father," said Venia, with a scandalised glance at him, "how can you?"

"Shame!" said the bystanders, briefly, as they

watched anxiously for signs of returning life on the part of Mr. Blundell. He lay still with his eyes closed, but his hearing was still acute, and the sounds of a rapidly approaching barrel trundled by a breathless Samaritan did him more good than anything.

"Good-bye, Venia," he said, in a faint voice; "good-bye."

Miss Turnbull sobbed and took his hand.

"He's shamming," roared Mr. Turnbull, incensed beyond measure at the faithful manner in which Blundell was carrying out his instructions. "He pushed me in."

There was an angry murmur from the bystanders.

"Be reasonable, Mr. Turnbull," said the sergeant, somewhat sharply.

"He nearly lost 'is life over you," said the stout fisherman. "As plucky a thing as ever I see. If I 'adn't ha' been 'andy with that there line you'd both ha' been drownded."

"Give—my love—to everybody," said Blundell, faintly. "Good-bye, Venia. Good-bye, Mr. Turnbull."

"Where's that barrel?" demanded the stout fisherman, crisply. "Going to be all night with it? Now, two of you——"

Mr. Blundell, with a great effort, and assisted by Venia and the sergeant, sat up. He felt that he had made a good impression, and had no desire to spoil it

by riding the barrel. With one exception, everybody was regarding him with moist-eyed admiration. The exception's eyes were, perhaps, the moistest of them all, but admiration had no place in them.

"You're all being made fools of," he said, getting up and stamping. "I tell you he pushed me overboard for the purpose."

"Oh, father! how can you?" demanded Venia, angrily. "He saved your life."

"He pushed me in," repeated the farmer. "Told me to look at a jelly-fish and pushed me in."

"What for?" inquired Sergeant Daly.

"Because—" said Mr. Turnbull. He looked at the unconscious sergeant, and the words on his lips died away in an inarticulate growl.

"What for?" pursued the sergeant, in triumph. "Be reasonable, Mr. Turnbull. Where's the reason in pushing you overboard and then nearly losing his life saving you? That would be a fool's trick. It was as fine a thing as ever I saw."

"What you 'ad, Mr. Turnbull," said the stout fisherman, tapping him on the arm, "was a little touch o' the sun."

"What felt to you like a push," said another man, "and over you went."

"As easy as easy," said a third.

"You're red in the face now," said the stout fisherman, regarding him critically, "and your eyes are

starting. You take my advice and get 'ome and get to bed, and the first thing you'll do when you get your senses back will be to go round and thank Mr. Blundell for all 'e's done for you."

"You take my advice and get 'ome and get to bed."

Mr. Turnbull looked at them, and the circle of intelligent faces grew misty before his angry eyes. One man, ignoring his sodden condition, recommended a wet handkerchief tied round his brow.

"I don't want any thanks, Mr. Turnbull," said

Blundell, feebly, as he was assisted to his feet. "I'd do as much for you again."

The stout fisherman patted him admiringly on the back, and Mr. Turnbull felt like a prophet beholding a realised vision as the spectators clustered round Mr. Blundell and followed their friends' example. Tenderly but firmly they led the hero in triumph up the quay toward home, shouting out eulogistic descriptions of his valour to curious neighbours as they passed. Mr. Turnbull, churlishly keeping his distance in the rear of the procession, received in grim silence the congratulations of his friends.

The extraordinary hallucination caused by the sunstroke lasted with him for over a week, but at the end of that time his mind cleared and he saw things in the same light as reasonable folk. Venia was the first to congratulate him upon his recovery; but his extraordinary behaviour in proposing to Miss Sippet the very day on which she herself became Mrs. Blundell convinced her that his recovery was only partial.

BILL'S LAPSE

WILL OWEN

BILL'S LAPSE

STRENGTH and good-nature—said the night-watchman, musingly, as he felt his biceps—strength and good-nature always go together. Sometimes you find a strong man who is not good-natured, but then, as everybody he comes in contack with is, it comes to the same thing.

The strongest and kindest-'earted man I ever come across was a man o' the name of Bill Burton, a shipmate of Ginger Dick's. For that matter 'e was a shipmate o' Peter Russet's and old Sam Small's too. Not over and above tall; just about my height, his arms was like another man's legs for size, and 'is chest and his back and shoulders might ha' been made for a giant. And with all that he'd got a soft blue eye like a gal's (blue's my favourite colour for gals' eyes), and a nice, soft, curly brown beard. He was an A.B., too, and that showed 'ow good-natured he was, to pick up with firemen.

He got so fond of 'em that when they was all paid off from the *Ocean King* he asked to be allowed to join them in taking a room ashore. It pleased everybody, four coming cheaper than three, and Bill being

that good-tempered that 'e'd put up with anything, and when any of the three quarrelled he used to act the part of peacemaker.

The only thing about 'im that they didn't like was that 'e was a teetotaler. He'd go into public-'ouses with 'em, but he wouldn't drink; leastways, that is to say, he wouldn't drink beer, and Ginger used to say that it made 'im feel uncomfortable to see Bill put away a bottle o' lemonade every time they 'ad a drink. One night arter 'e had 'ad seventeen bottles he could 'ardly got home, and Peter Russet, who knew a lot about pills and such-like, pointed out to 'im 'ow bad it was for his constitushon. He proved that the lemonade would eat away the coats o' Bill's stomach, and that if 'e kept on 'e might drop down dead at any moment.

That frightened Bill a bit, and the next night, instead of 'aving lemonade, 'e had five bottles o' stone ginger-beer, six of different kinds of teetotal beer, three of soda-water, and two cups of coffee. I'm not counting the drink he 'ad at the chemist's shop arterward, because he took that as medicine, but he was so queer in 'is inside next morning that 'e began to be afraid he'd 'ave to give up drink altogether.

He went without the next night, but 'e was such a generous man that 'e would pay every fourth time, and there was no pleasure to the other chaps to see 'im pay and 'ave nothing out of it. It spoilt their

evening, and owing to 'aving only about 'arf wot they was accustomed to they all got up very disagreeable next morning.

"Why not take just a *little* beer, Bill?" asks Ginger.

Bill 'ung his 'ead and looked a bit silly. "I'd rather not, mate," he ses, at last. "I've been teetotal for eleven months now."

"Think of your 'ealth, Bill," ses Peter Russet; "your 'ealth is more important than the pledge. Wot made you take it?"

Bill coughed. "I 'ad reasons," he ses, slowly. "A mate o' mine wished me to."

"He ought to ha' known better," ses Sam.

"He 'ad 'is reasons," ses Bill.

"Well, all I can say is, Bill," ses Ginger, "all I can say is, it's very disobligin' of you."

"Disobligin'?" ses Bill, with a start; "don't say that, mate."

"I must say it," ses Ginger, speaking very firm.

"You needn't take a lot, Bill," ses Sam; "nobody wants you to do that. Just drink in moderation, same as wot we do."

"It gets into my 'ead," ses Bill, at last.

"Well, and wot of it?" ses Ginger; "it gets into everybody's 'ead occasionally. Why, one night old Sam 'ere went up behind a policeman and tickled 'im under the arms; didn't you, Sam?"

"I did nothing o' the kind," ses Sam, firing up.

"Well, you was fined ten bob for it next morning, that's all I know," ses Ginger.

"I was fined ten bob for punching 'im," ses old Sam, very wild. "I never tickled a policeman in my life. I never thought o' such a thing. I'd no more tickle a policeman than I'd fly. Anybody that ses I did is a liar. Why should I? Where does the sense come in? Wot should I want to do it for?"

"All right, Sam," ses Ginger, sticking 'is fingers in 'is ears, "you didn't, then."

"No, I didn't," ses Sam, "and don't you forget it. This ain't the fust time you've told that lie about me. I can take a joke with any man; but anybody that goes and ses I tickled——"

"All *right*," ses Ginger and Peter Russet together. "You'll 'ave tickled policeman on the brain if you ain't careful, Sam," ses Peter.

Old Sam sat down growling, and Ginger Dick turned to Bill agin. "It gets into everybody's 'ead at times," he ses, "and where's the 'arm? It's wot it was meant for."

Bill shook his 'ead, but when Ginger called 'im disobligin' agin he gave way and he broke the pledge that very evening with a pint o' six 'arf.

Ginger was surprised to see the way 'e took his liquor. Arter three or four pints he'd expected to see 'im turn a bit silly, or sing, or do something o' the kind, but Bill kept on as if 'e was drinking water.

"Think of the 'armless pleasure you've been losing all these months, Bill," ses Ginger, smiling at him.

Bill said it wouldn't bear thinking of, and, the next place they came to he said some rather 'ard things of the man who'd persuaded 'im to take the pledge. He 'ad two or three more there, and then they began to see that it was beginning to have an effect on 'im. The first one that noticed it was Ginger Dick. Bill 'ad just lit 'is pipe, and as he threw the match down he ses: "I don't like these 'ere safety matches," he ses.

"Don't you, Bill?" ses Ginger. " I do, rather."

"Oh, you do, do you?" ses Bill, turning on 'im like lightning; "well, take that for contradictin'," he ses, an' he gave Ginger a smack that nearly knocked his 'ead off.

It was so sudden that old Sam and Peter put their beer down and stared at each other as if they couldn't believe their eyes. Then they stooped down and helped pore Ginger on to 'is legs agin and began to brush 'im down.

"Never mind about 'im, mates," ses Bill, looking at Ginger very wicked. "P'r'aps he won't be so ready to give me 'is lip next time. Let's come to another pub and enjoy ourselves."

Sam and Peter followed 'im out like lambs, 'ardly daring to look over their shoulder at Ginger, who was staggering arter them some distance behind a 'olding a handerchief to 'is face.

"It's your turn to pay, Sam," ses Bill, when they'd got inside the next place. "Wot's it to be? Give it a name."

"Three 'arf pints o' four ale, miss," ses Sam, not because 'e was mean, but because it wasn't 'is turn.

"Three wot?" ses Bill, turning on 'im.

"Three pots o' six ale, miss," ses Sam, in a hurry.

"That wasn't wot you said afore," ses Bill. "Take that," he ses, giving pore old Sam a wipe in the mouth and knocking 'im over a stool; "take that for your sauce."

Peter Russet stood staring at Sam and wondering wot Bill ud be like when he'd 'ad a little more. Sam picked hisself up arter a time and went outside to talk to Ginger about it, and then Bill put 'is arm round Peter's neck and began to cry a bit and say 'e was the only pal he'd got left in the world. It was very awkward for Peter, and more awkward still when the barman came up and told 'im to take Bill outside.

"Go on," he ses, "out with 'im."

"He's all right," ses Peter, trembling; "'e's the truest-'arted gentleman in London. Ain't you, Bill?"

Bill said he was, and 'e asked the barman to go and hide 'is face because it reminded 'im of a little dog 'e had 'ad once wot 'ad died.

"You get outside afore you're hurt," ses the barman.

Bill punched at 'im over the bar, and not being able to reach 'im threw Peter's pot o' beer at 'im. There was a fearful to-do then, and the landlord jumped over the bar and stood in the doorway, whistling for

" Bill jumped into a cab and pulled Peter Russet in arter 'im."

the police. Bill struck out right and left, and the men in the bar went down like skittles, Peter among them. Then they got outside, and Bill, arter giving the landlord a thump in the back wot nearly made him swallow the whistle, jumped into a cab and pulled Peter Russet in arter 'im.

"I'll talk to you by-and-by," he ses, as the cab drove off at a gallop; "there ain't room in this cab. You wait, my lad, that's all. You just wait till we get out, and I'll knock you silly."

"Wot for, Bill?" ses Peter, staring.

"Don't you talk to me," roars Bill. "If I choose to knock you about that's my business, ain't it? Besides, you know very well."

He wouldn't let Peter say another word, but coming to a quiet place near the docks he stopped the cab and pulling 'im out gave 'im such a dressing down that Peter thought 'is last hour 'ad arrived. He let 'im go at last, and after first making him pay the cabman took 'im along till they came to a public-'ouse and made 'im pay for drinks.

They stayed there till nearly eleven o'clock, and then Bill set off home 'olding the unfortunit Peter by the scruff o' the neck, and wondering out loud whether 'e ought to pay 'im a bit more or not. Afore 'e could make up 'is mind, however, he turned sleepy, and, throwing 'imself down on the bed which was meant for the two of 'em, fell into a peaceful sleep.

Sam and Ginger Dick came in a little while arterward, both badly marked where Bill 'ad hit them, and sat talking to Peter in whispers as to wot was to be done. Ginger, who 'ad plenty of pluck, was for them all to set on to 'im, but Sam wouldn't 'ear of it, and as for Peter he was so sore he could 'ardly move.

They all turned in to the other bed at last, 'arf afraid to move for fear of disturbing Bill, and when they woke up in the morning and see 'im sitting up in 'is bed they lay as still as mice.

"Why, Ginger, old chap," ses Bill, with a 'earty smile, "wot are you all three in one bed for?"

"We was a bit cold," ses Ginger.

"Cold?" ses Bill. "Wot, this weather? We 'ad a bit of a spree last night, old man, didn't we? My throat's as dry as a cinder."

"It ain't my idea of a spree," ses Ginger, sitting up and looking at 'im.

"Good 'eavens, Ginger!" ses Bill, starting back, "wotever 'ave you been a-doing to your face? Have you been tumbling off of a 'bus?"

Ginger couldn't answer; and Sam Small and Peter sat up in bed alongside of 'im, and Bill, getting as far back on 'is bed as he could, sat staring at their pore faces as if 'e was having a 'orrible dream.

"And there's Sam," he ses. "Where ever did you get that mouth, Sam?"

"Same place as Ginger got 'is eye and pore Peter got 'is face," ses Sam, grinding his teeth.

"You don't mean to tell me," ses Bill, in a sad voice—"you don't mean to tell me that I did it?"

"You know well enough," ses Ginger.

Bill looked at 'em, and 'is face got as long as a yard measure.

"I'd 'oped I'd growed out of it, mates," he ses, at last, "but drink always takes me like that. I can't keep a pal."

"You sur-prise me," ses Ginger, sarcastic-like.

"Don't talk like that, Ginger," ses Bill, 'arf crying. "It ain't my fault; it's my weakness. Wot did I do it for?"

"I don't know," ses Ginger, "but you won't get the chance of doing it agin, I'll tell you that much."

"I daresay I shall be better to-night, Ginger," ses Bill, very humble; "it don't always take me that way."

"Well, we don't want you with us any more," ses old Sam, 'olding his 'ead very high.

"You'll 'ave to go and get your beer by yourself, Bill," ses Peter Russet, feeling 'is bruises with the tips of 'is fingers.

"But then I should be worse," ses Bill. "I want cheerful company when I'm like that. I should very likely come 'ome and 'arf kill you all in your beds. You don't 'arf know what I'm like. Last night was nothing, else I should 'ave remembered it."

"Cheerful company?" ses old Sam. "'Ow do you think company's going to be cheerful when you're carrying on like that, Bill? Why don't you go away and leave us alone?"

"Because I've got a 'art," ses Bill. "I can't chuck up pals in that free-and-easy way. Once I take a lik-

ing to anybody I'd do anything for 'em, and I've never met three chaps I like better than wot I do you. Three nicer, straightforrad, free-'anded mates I've never met afore."

"Why not take the pledge agin, Bill?" ses Peter Russet.

"No, mate," ses Bill, with a kind smile; "it's just a weakness, and I must try and grow out of it. I'll tie a bit o' string round my little finger to-night as a reminder."

He got out of bed and began to wash 'is face, and Ginger Dick, who was doing a bit o' thinking, gave a whisper to Sam and Peter Russet.

"All right, Bill, old man," he ses, getting out of bed and beginning to put his clothes on; "but first of all we'll try and find out 'ow the landlord is."

"Landlord?" ses Bill, puffing and blowing in the basin. "Wot landlord?"

"Why, the one you bashed," ses Ginger, with a wink at the other two. "He 'adn't got 'is senses back when me and Sam came away."

Bill gave a groan and sat on the bed while 'e dried himself, and Ginger told 'im 'ow he 'ad bent a quart pot on the landlord's 'ead, and 'ow the landlord 'ad been carried upstairs and the doctor sent for. He began to tremble all over, and when Ginger said he'd go out and see 'ow the land lay 'e could 'ardly thank 'im enough.

Ginger was gone about two hours, and when 'e came back he looked so solemn that old Sam asked 'im whether he 'ad seen a ghost. Ginger didn't answer 'im; he set down on the side o' the bed and sat thinking.

"I s'pose—I s'pose it's nice and fresh in the streets this morning?" ses Bill, at last, in a trembling voice.

Ginger started and looked at 'im. "I didn't notice, mate," he ses. Then 'e got up and patted Bill on the back, very gentle, and sat down again.

"Anything wrong, Ginger?" asks Peter Russet, staring at 'im.

"It's that landlord," ses Ginger; "there's straw down in the road outside, and they say that he's dying. Pore old Bill don't know 'is own strength. The best thing you can do, old pal, is to go as far away as you can, at once."

"I shouldn't wait a minnit if it was me," ses old Sam.

Bill groaned and hid 'is face in his 'ands, and then Peter Russet went and spoilt things by saying that the safest place for a murderer to 'ide in was London. Bill gave a dreadful groan when 'e said murderer, but 'e up and agreed with Peter, and all Sam and Ginger Dick could do wouldn't make 'im alter his mind. He said that he would shave off 'is beard and moustache, and when night came 'e would creep out and take a lodging somewhere right the other end of London.

He stayed in the bedroom all day, with the blinds down, and wouldn't eat anything, and when Ginger looked in about eight o'clock to find out whether he 'ad gone, he found 'im sitting on the bed clean shaved,

"Then 'e got up and patted Bill on the back, very gentle."

and 'is face cut about all over where the razor 'ad slipped.

"It'll soon be dark," ses Ginger, "and your own brother wouldn't know you now, Bill. Where d'you think of going?"

Bill shook his 'ead. "Nobody must know that, mate," he ses. "I must go into hiding for as long as I can—as long as my money lasts; I've only got six pounds left."

"That'll last a long time if you're careful," ses Ginger.

"I want a lot more," ses Bill. "I want you to take this silver ring as a keepsake, Ginger. If I 'ad another six pounds or so I should feel much safer. 'Ow much 'ave you got, Ginger?"

"Not much," ses Ginger, shaking his 'ead.

"Lend it to me, mate," ses Bill, stretching out his 'and. "You can easy get another ship. Ah, I wish I was you; I'd be as 'appy as 'appy if I hadn't got a penny."

"I'm very sorry, Bill," ses Ginger, trying to smile, "but I've already promised to lend it to a man wot we met this evening. A promise is a promise, else I'd lend it to you with pleasure."

"Would you let me be 'ung for the sake of a few pounds, Ginger?" ses Bill, looking at 'im reproachfully. "I'm a desprit man, Ginger, and I must 'ave that money."

Afore pore Ginger could move he suddenly clapped 'is hand over 'is mouth and flung 'im on the bed. Ginger was like a child in 'is hands, although he struggled like a madman, and in five minutes 'e was laying there with a towel tied round his mouth and

'is arms and legs tied up with the cord off of Sam's chest.

"I'm very sorry, Ginger," ses Bill, as 'e took a little over eight pounds out of Ginger's pocket. "I'll pay you back one o' these days, if I can. If you'd got a rope round your neck same as I 'ave you'd do the same as I've done."

He lifted up the bedclothes and put Ginger inside and tucked 'im up. Ginger's face was red with passion and 'is eyes starting out of his 'ead.

"Eight and six is fifteen," ses Bill, and just then he 'eard somebody coming up the stairs. Ginger 'eard it, too, and as Peter Russet came into the room 'e tried all 'e could to attract 'is attention by rolling 'is 'ead from side to side.

"Why, 'as Ginger gone to bed?" ses Peter. "Wot's up, Ginger?"

"He's all right," ses Bill; "just a bit of a 'eadache."

Peter stood staring at the bed, and then 'e pulled the clothes off and saw pore Ginger all tied up, and making awful eyes at 'im to undo him.

"I 'ad to do it, Peter," ses Bill. "I wanted some more money to escape with, and 'e wouldn't lend it to me. I 'aven't got as much as I want now. You just came in in the nick of time. Another minute and you'd ha' missed me. 'Ow much 'ave you got?"

"Ah, I wish I could lend you some, Bill," ses Peter Russet, turning pale, "but I've 'ad my pocket

picked; that's wot I came back for, to get some from Ginger."

Bill didn't say a word.

"You see 'ow it is, Bill," ses Peter, edging back toward the door; "three men laid 'old of me and took every farthing I'd got."

"Well, I can't rob you, then," ses Bill, catching 'old of 'im. "Whoever's money this is," he ses, pulling a handful out o' Peter's pocket, "it can't be yours. Now, if you make another sound I'll knock your 'ead off afore I tie you up."

"Don't tie me up, Bill," ses Peter, struggling.

"I can't trust you," ses Bill, dragging 'im over to the washstand and taking up the other towel; "turn round."

Peter was a much easier job than Ginger Dick, and arter Bill 'ad done 'im 'e put 'im in alongside o' Ginger and covered 'em up, arter first tying both the gags round with some string to prevent 'em slipping.

"Mind, I've only borrowed it," he ses, standing by the side o' the bed; "but I must say, mates, I'm disappointed in both of you. If either of you 'ad 'ad the misfortune wot I've 'ad, I'd have sold the clothes off my back to 'elp you. And I wouldn't 'ave waited to be asked neither."

He stood there for a minute very sorrowful, and then 'e patted both their 'eads and went downstairs. Ginger and Peter lay listening for a bit, and then

they turned their pore bound-up faces to each other and tried to talk with their eyes.

Then Ginger began to wriggle and try and twist the cords off, but 'e might as well 'ave tried to wriggle out of 'is skin. The worst of it was they couldn't make known their intentions to each other, and when Peter Russet leaned over 'im and tried to work 'is gag off by rubbing it up agin 'is nose, Ginger pretty near went crazy with temper. He banged Peter with his 'ead, and Peter banged back, and they kept it up till they'd both got splitting 'eadaches, and at last they gave up in despair and lay in the darkness waiting for Sam.

And all this time Sam was sitting in the Red Lion, waiting for them. He sat there quite patient till twelve o'clock and then walked slowly 'ome, wondering wot 'ad happened and whether Bill had gone.

Ginger was the fust to 'ear 'is foot on the stairs, and as he came into the room, in the darkness, him an' Peter Russet started shaking their bed in a way that scared old Sam nearly to death. He thought it was Bill carrying on agin, and 'e was out o' that door and 'arf-way downstairs afore he stopped to take breath. He stood there trembling for about ten minutes, and then, as nothing 'appened, he walked slowly upstairs agin on tiptoe, and as soon as they heard the door creak Peter and Ginger made that bed do everything but speak.

"Is that you, Bill?" ses old Sam, in a shaky voice, and standing ready to dash downstairs agin.

There was no answer except for the bed, and Sam didn't know whether Bill was dying or whether 'e 'ad got delirium trimmings. All 'e did know was that 'e wasn't going to sleep in that room. He shut the door gently and went downstairs agin, feeling in 'is pocket for a match, and, not finding one, 'e picked out the softest stair 'e could find and, leaning his 'ead agin the banisters, went to sleep.

It was about six o'clock when 'e woke up, and broad daylight. He was stiff and sore all over, and feeling braver in the light 'e stepped softly upstairs and opened the door. Peter and Ginger was waiting for 'im, and as he peeped in 'e saw two things sitting up in bed with their 'air standing up all over like mops and their faces tied up with bandages. He was that startled 'e nearly screamed, and then 'e stepped into the room and stared at 'em as if he couldn't believe 'is eyes.

"Is that you, Ginger?" he ses. "Wot d'ye mean by making sights of yourselves like that? 'Ave you took leave of your senses?"

Ginger and Peter shook their 'eads and rolled their eyes, and then Sam see wot was the matter with 'em. Fust thing 'e did was to pull out 'is knife and cut Ginger's gag off, and the fust thing Ginger did was to call 'im every name 'e could lay his tongue to.

"You wait a moment," he screams, 'arf crying with rage. "You wait till I get my 'ands loose and I'll

" 'e picked out the softest stair 'e could find."

pull you to pieces. The idea o' leaving us like this all night, you old crocodile. I 'eard you come in. I'll pay you."

Sam didn't answer 'im. He cut off Peter Russet's gag, and Peter Russet called 'im 'arf a score o' names without taking breath.

"And when Ginger's finished I'll 'ave a go at you," he ses. "Cut off these lines."

"At once, d'ye hear?" ses Ginger. "Oh, you wait till I get my 'ands on you."

Sam didn't answer 'em; he shut up 'is knife with a click and then 'e sat at the foot o' the bed on Ginger's feet and looked at 'em. It wasn't the fust time they'd been rude to 'im, but as a rule he'd 'ad to put up with it. He sat and listened while Ginger swore 'imself faint.

"That'll do," he ses, at last; "another word and I shall put the bedclothes over your 'ead. Afore I do anything more I want to know wot it's all about."

Peter told 'im, arter fust calling 'im some more names, because Ginger was past it, and when 'e'd finished old Sam said 'ow surprised he was at them for letting Bill do it, and told 'em how they ought to 'ave prevented it. He sat there talking as though 'e enjoyed the sound of 'is own voice, and he told Peter and Ginger all their faults and said wot sorrow it caused their friends. Twice he 'ad to throw the bed-

clothes over their 'eads because o' the noise they was making.

"*Are—you—going—to undo—us?*" ses Ginger, at last.

"Old Sam said 'ow surprised he was at them for letting Bill do it."

"No, Ginger," ses old Sam; "in justice to myself I couldn't do it. Arter wot you've said—and arter wot I've said—my life wouldn't be safe. Besides which, you'd want to go shares in my money."

He took up 'is chest and marched downstairs with it, and about 'arf an hour arterward the landlady's 'usband came up and set 'em free. As soon as they'd got the use of their legs back they started out to look for Sam, but they didn't find 'im for nearly a year, and as for Bill, they never set eyes on 'im again.

LAWYER QUINCE

WILL OWEN

LAWYER QUINCE

LAWYER QUINCE, so called by his neighbours in Little Haven from his readiness at all times to place at their disposal the legal lore he had acquired from a few old books while following his useful occupation of making boots, sat in a kind of wooden hutch at the side of his cottage plying his trade. The London coach had gone by in a cloud of dust some three hours before, and since then the wide village street had slumbered almost undisturbed in the sunshine.

Hearing footsteps and the sound of voices raised in dispute caused him to look up from his work. Mr. Rose, of Holly Farm, Hogg, the miller, and one or two neighbours of lesser degree appeared to be in earnest debate over some point of unusual difficulty.

Lawyer Quince took a pinch of snuff and bent to his work again. Mr. Rose was one of the very few who openly questioned his legal knowledge, and his gibes concerning it were only too frequent. Moreover, he had a taste for practical joking, which to a grave man was sometimes offensive.

"Well, here he be," said Mr. Hogg to the farmer, as the group halted in front of the hutch. "Now ask

Lawyer Quince and see whether I ain't told you true. I'm willing to abide by what he says."

Mr. Quince put down his hammer and, brushing a little snuff from his coat, leaned back in his chair and eyed them with grave confidence.

"It's like this," said the farmer. "Young Pascoe has been hanging round after my girl Celia, though I told her she wasn't to have nothing to do with him. Half an hour ago I was going to put my pony in its stable when I see a young man sitting there waiting."

"Well?" said Mr. Quince, after a pause.

"He's there yet," said the farmer. "I locked him in, and Hogg here says that I've got the right to keep him locked up there as long as I like. I say it's agin the law, but Hogg he says no. I say his folks would come and try to break open my stable, but Hogg says if they do I can have the law of 'em for damaging my property."

"So you can," interposed Mr. Hogg, firmly. "You see whether Lawyer Quince don't say I'm right."

Mr. Quince frowned, and in order to think more deeply closed his eyes. Taking advantage of this three of his auditors, with remarkable unanimity, each closed one.

"It's your stable," said Mr. Quince, opening his eyes and speaking with great deliberation, "and you have a right to lock it up when you like."

"There you are," said Mr. Hogg; "what did I tell you?"

"If anybody's there that's got no business there, that's his look-out," continued Mr. Quince. "You didn't induce him to go in?"

"Certainly not," replied the farmer.

"I told him he can keep him there as long as he likes," said the jubilant Mr. Hogg, "and pass him in bread and water through the winder; it's got bars to it."

"Yes," said Mr. Quince, nodding, "he can do that. As for his folks knocking the place about, if you like to tie up one or two of them nasty, savage dogs of yours to the stable, well, it's your stable, and you can fasten your dogs to it if you like. And you've generally got a man about the yard."

Mr. Hogg smacked his thigh in ecstasy.

"But—" began the farmer.

"That's the law," said the autocratic Mr. Quince, sharply. "O' course, if you think you know more about it than I do, I've nothing more to say."

"I don't want to do nothing I could get into trouble for," murmured Mr. Rose.

"You can't get into trouble by doing as I tell you," said the shoemaker, impatiently. "However, to be quite on the safe side, if I was in your place I should lose the key."

"Lose the key?" said the farmer, blankly.

"Lose the key," repeated the shoemaker, his eyes watering with intense appreciation of his own resourcefulness. "You can find it any time you want to, you know. Keep him there till he promises to give up your daughter, and tell him that as soon as he does you'll have a hunt for the key."

Mr. Rose regarded him with what the shoemaker easily understood to be speechless admiration.

"I—I'm glad I came to you," said the farmer, at last.

"You're welcome," said the shoemaker, loftily. "I'm always ready to give advice to them as require it."

"And good advice it is," said the smiling Mr. Hogg. "Why don't you behave yourself, Joe Garnham?" he demanded, turning fiercely on a listener.

Mr. Garnham, whose eyes were watering with emotion, attempted to explain, but, becoming hysterical, thrust a huge red handkerchief to his mouth and was led away by a friend. Mr. Quince regarded his departure with mild disdain.

"Little things please little minds," he remarked.

"So they do," said Mr. Hogg. "I never thought— What's the matter with you, George Askew?"

Mr. Askew, turning his back on him, threw up his hands with a helpless gesture and followed in the wake of Mr. Garnham. Mr. Hogg appeared to be

about to apologise, and then suddenly altering his mind made a hasty and unceremonious exit, accompanied by the farmer.

Mr. Quince raised his eyebrows and then, after a long and meditative pinch of snuff, resumed his work. The sun went down and the light faded slowly; distant voices sounded close on the still evening air, snatches of hoarse laughter jarred upon his ears. It was clear that the story of the imprisoned swain was giving pleasure to Little Haven.

He rose at last from his chair and, stretching his long, gaunt frame, removed his leather apron, and after a wash at the pump went into the house. Supper was laid, and he gazed with approval on the home-made sausage rolls, the piece of cold pork, and the cheese which awaited his onslaught.

"We won't wait for Ned," said Mrs. Quince, as she brought in a jug of ale and placed it by her husband's elbow.

Mr. Quince nodded and filled his glass.

"You've been giving more advice, I hear," said Mrs. Quince.

Her husband, who was very busy, nodded again.

"It wouldn't make no difference to young Pascoe's chance, anyway," said Mrs. Quince, thoughtfully.

Mr. Quince continued his labours. "Why?" he inquired, at last.

His wife smiled and tossed her head.

"Young Pascoe's no chance against our Ned," she said, swelling with maternal pride.

"Eh?" said the shoemaker, laying down his knife and fork. "Our Ned?"

"They are as fond of each other as they can be," said Mrs. Quince, "though I don't suppose Farmer Rose'll care for it; not but what our Ned's as good as he is."

"Is Ned up there now?" demanded the shoemaker, turning pale, as the mirthful face of Mr. Garnham suddenly occurred to him.

"Sure to be," tittered his wife. "And to think o' poor young Pascoe shut up in that stable while he's courting Celia!"

Mr. Quince took up his knife and fork again, but his appetite had gone. Whoever might be paying attention to Miss Rose at that moment he felt quite certain that it was not Mr. Ned Quince, and he trembled with anger as he saw the absurd situation into which the humorous Mr. Rose had led him. For years Little Haven had accepted his decisions as final and boasted of his sharpness to neighbouring hamlets, and many a cottager had brought his boots to be mended a whole week before their time for the sake of an interview.

He moved his chair from the table and smoked a pipe. Then he rose, and putting a couple of formi-

dable law-books under his arm, walked slowly down the road in the direction of Holly Farm.

The road was very quiet and the White Swan, usually full at this hour, was almost deserted, but if any doubts as to the identity of the prisoner lingered in his mind they were speedily dissipated by the behaviour of the few customers who crowded to the door to see him pass.

A hum of voices fell on his ear as he approached the farm; half the male and a goodly proportion of the female population of Little Haven were leaning against the fence or standing in little knots in the road, while a few of higher social status stood in the farm-yard itself.

"Come down to have a look at the prisoner?" inquired the farmer, who was standing surrounded by a little group of admirers.

"I came down to see you about that advice I gave you this afternoon," said Mr. Quince.

"Ah!" said the other.

"I was busy when you came," continued Mr. Quince, in a voice of easy unconcern, "and I gave you advice from memory. Looking up the subject after you'd gone I found that I was wrong."

"You don't say so?" said the farmer, uneasily. "If I've done wrong I'm only doing what you told me I could do."

"Mistakes will happen with the best of us," said

the shoemaker, loudly, for the benefit of one or two murmurers. "I've known a man to marry a woman

"'Come down to have a look at the prisoner?' inquired the farmer"

for her money before now and find out afterward that she hadn't got any."

One unit of the group detached itself and wandered listlessly toward the gate.

"Well, I hope I ain't done nothing wrong," said Mr. Rose, anxiously. "You gave me the advice; there's men here as can prove it. I don't want to do nothing agin the law. What had I better do?"

"Well, if I was you," said Mr. Quince, concealing his satisfaction with difficulty, "I should let him out at once and beg his pardon, and say you hope he'll do nothing about it. I'll put in a word for you if you like with old Pascoe."

Mr. Rose coughed and eyed him queerly.

"You're a Briton," he said, warmly. "I'll go and let him out at once."

He strode off to the stable, despite the protests of Mr. Hogg, and, standing by the door, appeared to be deep in thought; then he came back slowly, feeling in his pockets as he walked.

"William," he said, turning toward Mr. Hogg, "I s'pose you didn't happen to notice where I put that key?"

"That I didn't," said Mr. Hogg, his face clearing suddenly.

"I had it in my hand not half an hour ago," said the agitated Mr. Rose, thrusting one hand into his trouser-pocket and groping. "It can't be far."

Mr. Quince attempted to speak, and, failing, blew his nose violently.

"My memory ain't what it used to be," said the

farmer. "Howsomever, I dare say it'll turn up in a day or two."

"You—you'd better force the door," suggested Mr. Quince, struggling to preserve an air of judicial calm.

"No, no," said Mr. Rose; "I ain't going to damage my property like that. I can lock my stable-door and unlock it when I like; if people get in there as have no business there, it's their look-out."

"That's law," said Mr. Hogg; "I'll eat my hat if it ain't."

"Do you mean to tell me you've really lost the key?" demanded Mr. Quince, eyeing the farmer sternly.

"Seems like it," said Mr. Rose. "However, he won't come to no hurt. I'll put in some bread and water for him, same as you advised me to."

Mr. Quince mastered his wrath by an effort, and with no sign of discomposure moved away without making any reference to the identity of the unfortunate in the stable."

"Good-night," said the farmer, "and thank you for coming and giving me the fresh advice. It ain't everybody that 'ud ha' taken the trouble. If I hadn't lost that key——"

The shoemaker scowled, and with the two fat books under his arm passed the listening neighbours with the air of a thoughtful man out for an evening

stroll. Once inside his house, however, his manner changed, the attitude of Mrs. Quince demanding, at any rate, a show of concern.

"It's no good talking," he said at last. "Ned shouldn't have gone there, and as for going to law about it, I sha'n't do any such thing; I should never hear the end of it. I shall just go on as usual, as if nothing had happened, and when Rose is tired of keeping him there he must let him out. I'll bide my time."

Mrs. Quince subsided into vague mutterings as to what she would do if she were a man, coupled with sundry aspersions upon the character, looks, and family connections of Farmer Rose, which somewhat consoled her for being what she was.

"He has always made jokes about your advice," she said at length, "and now everybody'll think he's right. I sha'n't be able to look anybody in the face. I should have seen through it at once if it had been me. I'm going down to give him a bit o' my mind."

"You stay where you are," said Mr. Quince, sharply, "and, mind, you are not to talk about it to anybody. Farmer Rose 'ud like nothing better than to see us upset about it. I ain't done with him yet. You wait."

Mrs. Quince, having no option, waited, but nothing happened. The following day found Ned Quince still a prisoner, and, considering the circumstances, re-

markably cheerful. He declined point-blank to renounce his preposterous attentions, and said that, living on the premises, he felt half like a son-in-law already. He also complimented the farmer upon the quality of his bread.

The next morning found him still unsubdued, and, under interrogation from the farmer, he admitted that he liked it, and said that the feeling of being at home was growing upon him.

"If you're satisfied, I am," said Mr. Rose, grimly. "I'll keep you here till you promise; mind that."

"It's a nobleman's life," said Ned, peeping through the window, "and I'm beginning to like you as much as my real father."

"I don't want none o' yer impudence," said the farmer, reddening.

"You'll like me better when you've had me here a little longer," said Ned; "I shall grow on you. Why not be reasonable and make up your mind to it? Celia and I have."

"I'm going to send Celia away on Saturday," said Mr. Rose; "make yourself happy and comfortable in here till then. If you'd like another crust o' bread or an extra half pint o' water you've only got to mention it. When she's gone I'll have a hunt for that key, so as you can go back to your father and help him to understand his law-books better."

He strode off with the air of a conqueror, and hav-

ing occasion to go to the village looked in at the shoemaker's window as he passed and smiled broadly. For years Little Haven had regarded Mr. Quince

"'' None o' yer impudence,' said the farmer."

with awe, as being far too dangerous a man for the lay mind to tamper with, and at one stroke the farmer had revealed the hollowness of his pretensions. Only

that morning the wife of a labourer had called and asked him to hurry the mending of a pair of boots. She was a voluble woman, and having overcome her preliminary nervousness more than hinted that if he gave less time to the law and more to his trade it would be better for himself and everybody else.

Miss Rose accepted her lot in a spirit of dutiful resignation, and on Saturday morning after her father's admonition not to forget that the coach left the White Swan at two sharp, set off to pay a few farewell visits. By half-past twelve she had finished, and Lawyer Quince becoming conscious of a shadow on his work looked up to see her standing before the window. He replied to a bewitching smile with a short nod and became intent upon his work again.

For a short time Celia lingered, then to his astonishment she opened the gate and walked past the side of the house into the garden. With growing astonishment he observed her enter his tool-shed and close the door behind her.

For ten minutes he worked on and then, curiosity getting the better of him, he walked slowly to the tool-shed and, opening the door a little way, peeped in. It was a small shed, crowded with agricultural implements. The floor was occupied by an upturned wheelbarrow, and sitting on the barrow, with her soft cheek leaning against the wall, sat Miss Rose fast asleep. Mr. Quince coughed several times, each

cough being louder than the last, and then, treading softly, was about to return to the workshop when the girl stirred and muttered in her sleep. At first she was unintelligible, then he distinctly caught the words "idiot" and "blockhead."

"She's dreaming of somebody," said Mr. Quince to himself with conviction. "Wonder who it is?"

"Can't see—a thing—under—his—nose," murmured the fair sleeper.

"Celia!" said Mr. Quince, sharply. "*Celia!*"

He took a hoe from the wall and prodded her gently with the handle. A singularly vicious expression marred the soft features, but that was all.

"*Ce-lia!*" said the shoemaker, who feared sunstroke.

"Fancy if he—had—a moment's common sense," murmured Celia, drowsily, "and locked—the door."

Lawyer Quince dropped the hoe with a clatter and stood regarding her open-mouthed. He was a careful man with his property, and the stout door boasted a good lock. He sped to the house on tip-toe, and taking the key from its nail on the kitchen dresser returned to the shed, and after another puzzled glance at the sleeping girl locked her in.

For half an hour he sat in silent enjoyment of the situation—enjoyment which would have been increased if he could have seen Mr. Rose standing at the gate of Holly Farm, casting anxious glances up

and down the road. Celia's luggage had gone down to the White Swan, and an excellent cold luncheon was awaiting her attention in the living-room.

Half-past one came and no Celia, and five minutes later two farm labourers and a boy lumbered off in different directions in search of the missing girl, with instructions that she was to go straight to the White Swan to meet the coach. The farmer himself walked down to the inn, turning over in his mind a heated lecture composed for the occasion, but the coach came and, after a cheerful bustle and the consumption of sundry mugs of beer, sped on its way again.

He returned home in silent consternation, seeking in vain for a satisfactory explanation of the mystery. For a robust young woman to disappear in broad daylight and leave no trace behind her was extraordinary. Then a sudden sinking sensation in the region of the waistcoat and an idea occurred simultaneously.

He walked down to the village again, the idea growing steadily all the way. Lawyer Quince was hard at work, as usual, as he passed. He went by the window three times and gazed wistfully at the cottage. Coming to the conclusion at last that two heads were better than one in such a business, he walked on to the mill and sought Mr. Hogg.

"That's what it is," said the miller, as he breathed his suspicions. "I thought all along Lawyer Quince would have the laugh of you. He's wonderful deep.

Now, let's go to work cautious like. Try and look as if nothing had happened."

"I thought all along Lawyer Quince would have the laugh of you."

Mr. Rose tried.

"Try agin," said the miller, with some severity. "Get the red out o' your face and let your eyes go

back and don't look as though you're going to bite somebody."

Mr. Rose swallowed an angry retort, and with an attempt at careless ease sauntered up the road with the miller to the shoemaker's. Lawyer Quince was still busy, and looked up inquiringly as they passed before him.

"I s'pose," said the diplomatic Mr. Hogg, who was well acquainted with his neighbour's tidy and methodical habits—"I s'pose you couldn't lend me your barrow for half an hour? The wheel's off mine."

Mr. Quince hesitated, and then favoured him with a glance intended to remind him of his scurvy behaviour three days before.

"You can have it," he said at last, rising.

Mr. Hogg pinched his friend in his excitement, and both watched Mr. Quince with bated breath as he took long, slow strides toward the tool-shed. He tried the door and then went into the house, and even before his reappearance both gentlemen knew only too well what was about to happen. Red was all too poor a word to apply to Mr. Rose's countenance as the shoemaker came toward them, feeling in his waistcoat pocket with hooked fingers and thumb, while Mr. Hogg's expressive features were twisted into an appearance of rosy appreciation.

"Did you want the barrow very particular?" inquired the shoemaker, in a regretful voice.

"Very particular," said Mr. Hogg.

Mr. Quince went through the performance of feeling in all his pockets, and then stood meditatively rubbing his chin.

"The door's locked," he said, slowly, "and what I've done with that there key——"

"You open that door," vociferated Mr. Rose, "else I'll break it in. You've got my daughter in that shed and I'm going to have her out."

"Your daughter?" said Mr. Quince, with an air of faint surprise. "What should she be doing in my shed?"

"You let her out," stormed Mr. Rose, trying to push past him.

"Don't trespass on my premises," said Lawyer Quince, interposing his long, gaunt frame. "If you want that door opened you'll have to wait till my boy Ned comes home. I expect he knows where to find the key."

Mr. Rose's hands fell limply by his side and his tongue, turning prudish, refused its office. He turned and stared at Mr. Hogg in silent consternation.

"Never known him to be beaten yet," said that admiring weather-cock.

"Ned's been away three days," said the shoemaker, "but I expect him home soon."

Mr. Rose made a strange noise in his throat and

then, accepting his defeat, set off at a rapid pace in the direction of home. In a marvellously short space of time, considering his age and figure, he was seen returning with Ned Quince, flushed and dishevelled, walking by his side.

"Here he is," said the farmer. "Now where's that key?"

Lawyer Quince took his son by the arm and led him into the house, from whence they almost immediately emerged with Ned waving the key.

"I thought it wasn't far," said the sapient Mr. Hogg.

Ned put the key in the lock and flinging the door open revealed Celia Rose, blinking and confused in the sudden sunshine. She drew back as she saw her father and began to cry with considerable fervour.

"How did you get in that shed, miss?" demanded her parent, stamping.

Miss Rose trembled.

"I—I went there," she sobbed. "I didn't want to go away."

"Well, you'd better stay there," shouted the overwrought Mr. Rose. "I've done with you. A girl that 'ud turn against her own father I—I——"

He drove his right fist into his left palm and stamped out into the road. Lawyer Quince and Mr. Hogg, after a moment's hesitation, followed.

"The laugh's agin you, farmer," said the latter gentleman, taking his arm.

" ' How did you get in that shed ? ' demanded her parent."

Mr. Rose shook him off.

"Better make the best of it," continued the peacemaker.

"She's a girl to be proud of," said Lawyer Quince, keeping pace with the farmer on the other side. "She's got a head that's worth yours and mine put together, with Hogg's thrown in as a little makeweight."

"And here's the White Swan," said Mr. Hogg, who had a hazy idea of a compliment, "and all of us as dry as a bone. Why not all go in and have a glass to shut folks' mouths?"

"And cry quits," said the shoemaker.

"And let bygones be bygones," said Mr. Hogg, taking the farmer's arm again.

Mr. Rose stopped and shook his head obstinately, and then, under the skilful pilotage of Mr. Hogg, was steered in the direction of the hospitable doors of the White Swan. He made a last bid for liberty on the step and then disappeared inside. Lawyer Quince brought up the rear.

BREAKING A SPELL

BREAKING A SPELL

"WITCHCRAFT?" said the old man, thoughtfully, as he scratched his scanty whiskers. No, I ain't heard o' none in these parts for a long time. There used to be a little of it about when I was a boy, and there was some talk of it arter I'd growed up, but Claybury folk never took much count of it. The last bit of it I remember was about forty years ago, and that wasn't so much witchcraft as foolishness.

There was a man in this place then—Joe Barlcomb by name—who was a firm believer in it, and 'e used to do all sorts of things to save hisself from it. He was a new-comer in Claybury, and there was such a lot of it about in the parts he came from that the people thought o' nothing else hardly.

He was a man as got 'imself very much liked at fust, especially by the old ladies, owing to his being so perlite to them, that they used to 'old 'im up for an example to the other men, and say wot nice, pretty ways he 'ad. Joe Barlcomb was everything at fust, but when they got to 'ear that his perliteness was because 'e thought 'arf of 'em was witches, and didn't know which 'arf, they altered their minds.

In a month or two he was the laughing-stock of the place; but wot was worse to 'im than that was that he'd made enemies of all the old ladies. Some of 'em was free-spoken women, and 'e couldn't sleep for thinking of the 'arm they might do 'im.

He was terrible uneasy about it at fust, but, as nothing 'appened and he seemed to go on very pros-

"He got 'imself very much liked, especially by the old ladies."

perous-like, 'e began to forget 'is fears, when all of a sudden 'e went 'ome one day and found 'is wife in bed with a broken leg.

She was standing on a broken chair to reach something down from the dresser when it 'appened, and it was pointed out to Joe Barlcomb that it was a thing anybody might ha' done without being bewitched; but

he said 'e knew better, and that they'd kept that broken chair for standing on for years and years to save the others, and nothing 'ad ever 'appened afore.

In less than a week arter that three of his young 'uns was down with the measles, and, 'is wife being laid up, he sent for 'er mother to come and nurse 'em. It's as true as I sit 'ere, but that pore old lady 'adn't been in the house two hours afore she went to bed with the yellow jaundice.

Joe Barlcomb went out of 'is mind a'most. He'd never liked 'is wife's mother, and he wouldn't 'ave had 'er in the house on'y 'e wanted her to nurse 'is wife and children, and when she came and laid up and wanted waiting on 'e couldn't dislike her enough.

He was quite certain all along that somebody was putting a spell on 'im, and when 'e went out a morning or two arterward and found 'is best pig lying dead in a corner of the sty he gave up and, going into the 'ouse, told 'em all that they'd 'ave to die 'cause he couldn't do anything more for 'em. His wife's mother and 'is wife and the children all started crying together, and Joe Barlcomb, when 'e thought of 'is pig, he sat down and cried too.

He sat up late that night thinking it over, and, arter looking at it all ways, he made up 'is mind to go and see Mrs. Prince, an old lady that lived all alone by 'erself in a cottage near Smith's farm. He'd set 'er down for wot he called a white witch, which

is the best kind and on'y do useful things, such as charming warts away or telling gals about their future 'usbands; and the next arternoon, arter telling 'is wife's mother that fresh air and travelling was the best cure for the yellow jaundice, he set off to see 'er.

"Mrs. Prince was sitting at 'er front door nursing 'er three cats."

Mrs. Prince was sitting at 'er front door nursing 'er three cats when 'e got there. She was an ugly, little old woman with piercing black eyes and a hook nose, and she 'ad a quiet, artful sort of a way with

'er that made 'er very much disliked. One thing was she was always making fun of people, and for another she seemed to be able to tell their thoughts, and that don't get anybody liked much, especially when they don't keep it to theirselves. She'd been a lady's maid all 'er young days, and it was very 'ard to be taken for a witch just because she was old.

"Fine day, ma'am," ses Joe Barlcomb.

"Very fine," ses Mrs. Prince.

"Being as I was passing, I just thought I'd look in," ses Joe Barlcomb, eyeing the cats.

"Take a chair," ses Mrs. Prince, getting up and dusting one down with 'er apron.

Joe sat down. "I'm in a bit o' trouble, ma'am," he ses, "and I thought p'r'aps as you could help me out of it. My pore pig's been bewitched, and it's dead."

"Bewitched?" ses Mrs. Prince, who'd 'eard of 'is ideas. "Rubbish. Don't talk to me."

"It ain't rubbish, ma'am," ses Joe Barlcomb; "three o' my children is down with the measles, my wife's broke 'er leg, 'er mother is laid up in my little place with the yellow jaundice, and the pig's dead."

"Wot, another one?" ses Mrs. Prince.

"No; the same one," ses Joe.

"Well, 'ow am I to help you?" ses Mrs. Prince. "Do you want me to come and nurse 'em?"

"No, no," ses Joe, starting and turning pale; "un-

less you'd like to come and nurse my wife's mother," he ses, arter thinking a bit. "I was hoping that you'd know who'd been overlooking me and that you'd make 'em take the spell off."

Mrs. Prince got up from 'er chair and looked round for the broom she'd been sweeping with, but, not finding it, she set down agin and stared in a curious sort o' way at Joe Barlcomb.

"Oh, I see," she ses, nodding. "Fancy you guessing I was a witch."

"You can't deceive me," ses Joe; "I've 'ad too much experience; I knew it the fust time I saw you by the mole on your nose."

Mrs. Prince got up and went into her back-place, trying her 'ardest to remember wot she'd done with that broom. She couldn't find it anywhere, and at last she came back and sat staring at Joe for so long that 'e was 'arf frightened out of his life. And by-and-by she gave a 'orrible smile and sat rubbing the side of 'er nose with 'er finger.

"If I help you," she ses at last, "will you promise to keep it a dead secret and do exactly as I tell you? If you don't, dead pigs'll be nothing to the misfortunes that you will 'ave."

"I will," ses Joe Barlcomb, very pale.

"The spell," ses Mrs. Prince, holding up her 'ands and shutting 'er eyes, "was put upon you by a man. It is one out of six men as is jealous of you because

you're so clever, but which one it is I can't tell without your assistance. Have you got any money?"

"A little," ses Joe, anxious-like—"a very little. Wot with the yellow jaundice and other things, I——"

"Fust thing to do," ses Mrs. Prince, still with her eyes shut, "you go up to the Cauliflower to-night; the six men'll all be there, and you must buy six ha'pennies off of them; one each."

"Buy six ha'pennies?" ses Joe, staring at her.

"Don't repeat wot I say," ses Mrs. Prince; "it's unlucky. You buy six ha'pennies for a shilling each, without saying wot it's for. You'll be able to buy 'em all right if you're civil."

"It seems to me it don't need much civility for that," ses Joe, pulling a long face.

"When you've got the ha'pennies," ses Mrs. Prince, "bring 'em to me and I'll tell you wot to do with 'em. Don't lose no time, because I can see that something worse is going to 'appen if it ain't prevented."

"Is it anything to do with my wife's mother getting worse?" ses Joe Barlcomb, who was a careful man and didn't want to waste six shillings.

"No, something to you," ses Mrs. Prince.

Joe Barlcomb went cold all over, and then he put down a couple of eggs he'd brought round for 'er and went off 'ome agin, and Mrs. Prince stood in

the doorway with a cat on each shoulder and watched 'im till 'e was out of sight.

That night Joe Barlcomb came up to this 'ere Cauliflower public-house, same as he'd been told, and by-and-by, arter he 'ad 'ad a pint, he looked round, and taking a shilling out of 'is pocket put it on the table, and he ses, "Who'll give me a ha'penny for that?" he ses.

None of 'em seemed to be in a hurry. Bill Jones took it up and bit it, and rang it on the table and squinted at it, and then he bit it agin, and turned round and asked Joe Barlcomb wot was wrong with it.

"Wrong?" ses Joe; "nothing."

Bill Jones put it down agin. "You're wide awake, Joe," he ses, "but so am I."

"Won't nobody give me a ha'penny for it?" ses Joe, looking round.

Then Peter Lamb came up, and he looked at it and rang it, and at last he gave Joe a ha'penny for it and took it round, and everybody 'ad a look at it.

"It stands to reason it's a bad 'un," ses Bill Jones, "but it's so well done I wish as I'd bought it."

"H-s-h!" ses Peter Lamb; "don't let the landlord 'ear you."

The landlord 'ad just that moment come in, and Peter walked up and ordered a pint, and took his tenpence change as bold as brass. Arter that Joe Barl-

comb bought five more ha'pennies afore you could wink a'most, and every man wot sold one went up to the bar and 'ad a pint and got tenpence change, and drank Joe Barlcomb's health.

"He took it round, and everybody 'ad a look at it."

"There seems to be a lot o' money knocking about to-night," ses the landlord, as Sam Martin, the last of 'em, was drinking 'is pint.

Sam Martin choked and put 'is pot down on the counter with a bang, and him and the other five was

out o' that door and sailing up the road with their tenpences afore the landlord could get his breath. He stood in the bar scratching his 'ead and staring, but he couldn't understand it a bit till a man wot was too late to sell his ha'penny up and told 'im all about it. The fuss 'e made was terrible. The shillings was in a little heap on a shelf at the back o' the bar, and he did all sorts o' things to 'em to prove that they was bad, and threatened Joe Barlcomb with the police. At last, however, 'e saw wot a fool he was making of himself, and arter nearly breaking his teeth 'e dropped them into a drawer and stirred 'em up with the others.

Joe Barlcomb went round the next night to see Mrs. Prince, and she asked 'im a lot o' questions about the men as 'ad sold 'im the ha'pennies.

"The fust part 'as been done very well," she ses, nodding her 'ead at 'im; "if you do the second part as well, you'll soon know who your enemy is."

"Nothing'll bring the pig back," ses Joe.

"There's worse misfortunes than that, as I've told you," ses Mrs. Prince, sharply. "Now, listen to wot I'm going to say to you. When the clock strikes twelve to-night——"

"Our clock don't strike," ses Joe.

"Then you must borrow one that does," ses Mrs. Prince, "and when it strikes twelve you must go round

to each o' them six men and sell them a ha'penny for a shilling."

Joe Barlcomb looked at 'er. "'Ow?" he ses, short-like.

"Same way as you sold 'em a shilling for a ha'-penny," ses Mrs. Prince; "it don't matter whether they buy the ha'pennies or not. All you've got to do is to go and ask 'em, and the man as makes the most fuss is the man that 'as put the trouble on you."

"It seems a roundabout way o' going to work," ses Joe.

"*Wot!*" screams Mrs. Prince, jumping up and waving her arms about. "*Wot!* Go your own way; I'll have nothing more to do with you. And don't blame me for anything that happens. It's a very bad thing to come to a witch for advice and then not to do as she tells you. You ought to know that."

"I'll do it, ma'am," ses Joe Barlcomb, trembling.

"You'd better," ses Mrs. Prince; "and mind—not a word to anybody."

Joe promised her agin, and 'e went off and borrered a clock from Albert Price, and at twelve o'clock that night he jumped up out of bed and began to dress 'imself and pretend not to 'ear his wife when she asked 'im where he was going.

It was a dark, nasty sort o' night, blowing and raining, and, o' course, everybody 'ad gone to bed long since. The fust cottage Joe came to was Bill

Jones's, and, knowing Bill's temper, he stood for some time afore he could make up 'is mind to knock; but at last he up with 'is stick and banged away at the door.

A minute arterward he 'eard the bedroom winder pushed open, and then Bill Jones popped his 'ead out and called to know wot was the matter and who it was.

"It's me—Joe Barlcomb," ses Joe, "and I want to speak to you very partikler."

"Well, speak away," ses Bill. "You go into the back room," he ses, turning to his wife.

"Whaffor?" ses Mrs. Jones.

"'Cos I don't know wot Joe is going to say," ses Bill. "You go in now, afore I make you."

His wife went off grumbling, and then Bill told Joe Barlcomb to hurry up wot he'd got to say as 'e 'adn't got much on and the weather wasn't as warm as it might be.

"I sold you a shilling for a ha'penny last night, Bill," ses Joe.

"Do you want to sell any more?" ses Bill Jones, putting his 'and down to where 'is trouser pocket ought to be.

"Not exactly that," ses Joe Barlcomb. "This time I want you to sell me a shilling for a ha'penny."

Bill leaned out of the winder and stared down at Joe Barlcomb, and then he ses, in a choking voice,

"Is that wot you've come disturbing my sleep for at this time o' night?" he ses.

"I must 'ave it, Bill," ses Joe.

"Well, if you'll wait a moment," ses Bill, trying to speak perlitely, "I'll come down and give it to you."

Joe didn't like 'is tone of voice, but he waited, and all of a sudden Bill Jones came out o' that door like a gun going off and threw 'imself on Joe Barlcomb. Both of 'em was strong men, and by the time they'd finished they was so tired they could 'ardly stand. Then Bill Jones went back to bed, and Joe Barlcomb, arter sitting down on the doorstep to rest 'imself, went off and knocked up Peter Lamb.

Peter Lamb was a little man and no good as a fighter, but the things he said to Joe Barlcomb as he leaned out o' the winder and shook 'is fist at him was 'arder to bear than blows. He screamed away at the top of 'is voice for ten minutes, and then 'e pulled the winder to with a bang and went back to bed.

Joe Barlcomb was very tired, but he walked on to Jasper Potts's 'ouse, trying 'ard as he walked to decide which o' the fust two 'ad made the most fuss. Arter he 'ad left Jasper Potts 'e got more puzzled than ever, Jasper being just as bad as the other two, and Joe leaving 'im at last in the middle of loading 'is gun.

By the time he'd made 'is last call—at Sam Mar-

tin's—it was past three o'clock, and he could no more tell Mrs. Prince which 'ad made the most fuss than 'e could fly. There didn't seem to be a pin to choose between 'em, and, 'arf worried out of 'is life, he went straight on to Mrs. Prince and knocked 'er up to tell 'er. She thought the 'ouse was afire at fust, and came screaming out o' the front door in 'er bedgown, and when she found out who it was she was worse to deal with than the men 'ad been.

She 'ad quieted down by the time Joe went round to see 'er the next evening, and asked 'im to describe exactly wot the six men 'ad done and said. She sat listening quite quiet at fust, but arter a time she scared Joe by making a odd, croupy sort o' noise in 'er throat, and at last she got up and walked into the back-place. She was there a long time making funny noises, and at last Joe walked toward the door on tip-toe and peeped through the crack and saw 'er in a sort o' fit, sitting in a chair with 'er arms folded acrost her bodice and rocking 'erself up and down and moaning. Joe stood as if 'e'd been frozen a'most, and then 'e crept back to 'is seat and waited, and when she came into the room agin she said as the trouble 'ad all been caused by Bill Jones. She sat still for nearly 'arf an hour, thinking 'ard, and then she turned to Joe and ses:

"Can you read?" she ses.

"No," ses Joe, wondering wot was coming next.

"That's all right, then," she ses, "because if you could I couldn't do wot I'm going to do."

"That shows the 'arm of eddication," ses Joe. "I never did believe in it."

"She sat listening quite quiet at fust."

Mrs. Prince nodded, and then she went and got a bottle with something in it which looked to Joe like gin, and arter getting out 'er pen and ink and printing some words on a piece o' paper she stuck it on the bottle, and sat looking at Joe and thinking.

"Take this up to the Cauliflower," she ses, "make

friends with Bill Jones, and give him as much beer as he'll drink, and give 'im a little o' this gin in each mug. If he drinks it the spell will be broken, and you'll be luckier than you 'ave ever been in your life afore. When 'e's drunk some, and not before, leave the bottle standing on the table."

Joe Barlcomb thanked 'er, and with the bottle in 'is pocket went off to the Cauliflower, whistling. Bill Jones was there, and Peter Lamb, and two or three more of 'em, and at fust they said some pretty 'ard things to him about being woke up in the night.

"Don't bear malice, Bill," ses Joe Barlcomb; "'ave a pint with me."

He ordered two pints, and then sat down alongside o' Bill, and in five minutes they was like brothers.

"'Ave a drop o' gin in it, Bill," he ses, taking the bottle out of 'is pocket.

Bill thanked 'im and had a drop, and then, thoughtful-like, he wanted Joe to 'ave some in his too, but Joe said no, he'd got a touch o' toothache, and it was bad for it.

"I don't mind 'aving a drop in my beer, Joe," ses Peter Lamb.

"Not to-night, mate," ses Joe; "it's all for Bill. I bought it on purpose for 'im."

Bill shook 'ands with him, and when Joe called for another pint and put some more gin in it he said that 'e was the noblest-'arted man that ever lived.

"You wasn't saying so 'arf an hour ago," ses Peter Lamb.

"'Cos I didn't know 'im so well then," ses Bill Jones.

"You soon change your mind, don't you?" ses Peter.

Bill didn't answer 'im. He was leaning back on the bench and staring at the bottle as if 'e couldn't believe his eyesight. His face was all white and shining, and 'is hair as wet as if it 'ad just been dipped in a bucket o' water.

"See a ghost, Bill?" ses Peter, looking at 'im.

Bill made a 'orrible noise in his throat, and kept on staring at the bottle till they thought 'e'd gone crazy. Then Jasper Potts bent his 'ead down and began to read out loud wot was on the bottle. "P-o-i—POISON FOR BILL JONES," he ses, in a voice as if 'e couldn't believe it.

You might 'ave heard a pin drop. Everybody turned and looked at Bill Jones, as he sat there trembling all over. Then those that could read took up the bottle and read it out loud all over agin.

"Pore Bill," ses Peter Lamb. "I 'ad a feeling come over me that something was wrong."

"You're a murderer," ses Sam Martin, catching 'old of Joe Barlcomb. "You'll be 'ung for this. Look at pore Bill, cut off in 'is prime."

"Run for the doctor," ses someone.

Two of 'em ran off as 'ard as they could go, and then the landlord came round the bar and asked Bill to go and die outside, because 'e didn't want to be brought into it. Jasper Potts told 'im to clear off, and then he bent down and asked Bill where the pain was.

"I don't think he'll 'ave much pain," ses Peter Lamb, who always pretended to know a lot more than other people. "It'll soon be over, Bill."

"We've all got to go some day," ses Sam Martin.

"Better to die young than live to be a trouble to yourself," ses Bob Harris.

To 'ear them talk everybody seemed to think that Bill Jones was in luck; everybody but Bill Jones 'imself, that is.

"I ain't fit to die," he ses, shivering. "You don't know 'ow bad I've been."

"Wot 'ave you done, Bill?" ses Peter Lamb, in a soft voice. "If it'll ease your feelings afore you go to make a clean breast of it, we're all friends here."

Bill groaned.

"And it's too late for you to be punished for anything," ses Peter, arter a moment.

Bill Jones groaned agin, and then, shaking 'is 'ead, began to w'isper 'is wrong-doings. When the doctor came in 'arf an hour arterward all the men was as quiet as mice, and pore Bill was still w'ispering as 'ard as he could w'isper.

The doctor pushed 'em out of the way in a moment, and then 'e bent over Bill and felt 'is pulse and looked at 'is tongue. Then he listened to his 'art, and in a puzzled way smelt at the bottle, which Jasper Potts was a-minding of, and wetted 'is finger and tasted it.

"The doctor felt 'is pulse and looked at 'is tongue."

"Somebody's been making a fool of you and me too," he ses, in a angry voice. "It's only gin, and very good gin at that. Get up and go home."

It all came out next morning, and Joe Barlcomb was the laughing-stock of the place. Most people

said that Mrs. Prince 'ad done quite right, and they 'oped that it ud be a lesson to him, but nobody ever talked much of witchcraft in Claybury agin. One thing was that Bill Jones wouldn't 'ave the word used in 'is hearing.

ESTABLISHING RELATIONS

WILL OWEN

ESTABLISHING RELATIONS

MR. RICHARD CATESBY, second officer of the ss. *Wizard*, emerged from the dock-gates in high good-humour to spend an evening ashore. The bustle of the day had departed, and the inhabitants of Wapping, in search of coolness and fresh air, were sitting at open doors and windows indulging in general conversation with anybody within earshot.

Mr. Catesby, turning into Bashford's Lane, lost in a moment all this life and colour. The hum of distant voices certainly reached there, but that was all, for Bashford's Lane, a retiring thoroughfare facing a blank dock wall, capped here and there by towering spars, set an example of gentility which neighbouring streets had long ago decided crossly was impossible for ordinary people to follow. Its neatly grained shutters, fastened back by the sides of the windows, gave a pleasing idea of uniformity, while its white steps and polished brass knockers were suggestive of almost a Dutch cleanliness.

Mr. Catesby, strolling comfortably along, stopped suddenly for another look at a girl who was standing in the ground-floor window of No. 5. He went on a

few paces and then walked back slowly, trying to look as though he had forgotten something. The girl was still there, and met his ardent glances unmoved: a fine girl, with large, dark eyes, and a complexion which was the subject of much scandalous discussion among neighbouring matrons.

"It must be something wrong with the glass, or else it's the bad light," said Mr. Catesby to himself; "no girl is so beautiful as that."

He went by again to make sure. The object of his solicitude was still there and apparently unconscious of his existence. He passed very slowly and sighed deeply.

"You've got it at last, Dick Catesby," he said, solemnly; "fair and square in the most dangerous part of the heart. It's serious this time."

He stood still on the narrow pavement, pondering, and then, in excuse of his flagrant misbehaviour, murmured, "It was meant to be," and went by again. This time he fancied that he detected a somewhat supercilious expression in the dark eyes—a faint raising of well-arched eyebrows.

His engagement to wait at Aldgate Station for the second-engineer and spend an evening together was dismissed as too slow to be considered. He stood for some time in uncertainty, and then turning slowly into the Beehive, which stood at the corner, went into the private bar and ordered a glass of beer.

He was the only person in the bar, and the landlord, a stout man in his shirt-sleeves, was the soul of affability. Mr. Catesby, after various general re-

"Mr. Catesby made a few inquiries."

marks, made a few inquiries about an uncle aged five minutes, whom he thought was living in Bashford's Lane.

"I don't know 'im," said the landlord.

"I had an idea that he lived at No. 5," said Catesby.

The landlord shook his head. "That's Mrs. Truefitt's house," he said, slowly.

Mr. Catesby pondered. "Truefitt, Truefitt," he repeated; "what sort of a woman is she?"

"Widder-woman," said the landlord; "she lives there with 'er daughter Prudence."

Mr. Catesby said "Indeed!" and being a good listener learned that Mrs. Truefitt was the widow of a master-lighterman, and that her son, Fred Truefitt, after an absence of seven years in New Zealand, was now on his way home. He finished his glass slowly and, the landlord departing to attend to another customer, made his way into the street again.

He walked along slowly, picturing as he went the home-coming of the long-absent son. Things were oddly ordered in this world, and Fred Truefitt would probably think nothing of his brotherly privileges. He wondered whether he was like Prudence. He wondered——

"By Jove, I'll do it!" he said, recklessly, as he turned. "Now for a row."

He walked back rapidly to Bashford's Lane, and without giving his courage time to cool plied the knocker of No. 5 briskly.

The door was opened by an elderly woman, thin, and somewhat querulous in expression. Mr. Catesby

had just time to notice this, and then he flung his arm round her waist, and hailing her as "Mother!" saluted her warmly.

The faint scream of the astounded Mrs. Truefitt brought her daughter hastily into the passage. Mr. Catesby's idea was ever to do a thing thoroughly, and, relinquishing Mrs. Truefitt, he kissed Prudence with all the ardour which a seven-years' absence might be supposed to engender in the heart of a devoted brother. In return he received a box on the ears which made his head ring.

"He's been drinking," gasped the dismayed Mrs. Truefitt.

"Don't you know me, mother?" inquired Mr. Richard Catesby, in grievous astonishment.

"He's mad," said her daughter.

"Am I so altered that *you* don't know me, Prudence?" inquired Mr. Catesby, with pathos. "Don't you know your Fred?"

"Go out," said Mrs. Truefitt, recovering; "go out at once."

Mr. Catesby looked from one to the other in consternation.

"I know I've altered," he said, at last, "but I'd no idea——"

"If you don't go out at once I'll send for the police," said the elder woman, sharply. "Prudence, scream!"

"I'm not going to scream," said Prudence, eyeing the intruder with great composure. "I'm not afraid of him."

Despite her reluctance to have a scene—a thing which was strongly opposed to the traditions of Bashford's Lane—Mrs. Truefitt had got as far as the doorstep in search of assistance, when a sudden terrible thought occurred to her: Fred was dead, and the visitor had hit upon this extraordinary fashion of breaking the news gently.

"Come into the parlour," she said, faintly.

Mr. Catesby, suppressing his surprise, followed her into the room. Prudence, her fine figure erect and her large eyes meeting his steadily, took up a position by the side of her mother.

"You have brought bad news?" inquired the latter.

"No, mother," said Mr. Catesby, simply, "only myself, that's all."

Mrs. Truefitt made a gesture of impatience, and her daughter, watching him closely, tried to remember something she had once read about detecting insanity by the expression of the eyes. Those of Mr. Catesby were blue, and the only expression in them at the present moment was one of tender and respectful admiration.

"When did you see Fred last?" inquired Mrs. Truefitt, making another effort.

"Mother," said Mr. Catesby, with great pathos, "don't you know me?"

"He has brought bad news of Fred," said Mrs. Truefitt, turning to her daughter; "I am sure he has."

"I don't understand you," said Mr. Catesby, with a bewildered glance from one to the other. "I *am* Fred. Am I much changed? You look the same as you always did, and it seems only yesterday since I kissed Prudence good-bye at the docks. You were crying, Prudence."

Miss Truefitt made no reply; she gazed at him unflinchingly and then bent toward her mother.

"He is mad," she whispered; "we must try and get him out quietly. Don't contradict him."

"Keep close to me," said Mrs. Truefitt, who had a great horror of the insane. "If he turns violent open the window and scream. I thought he had brought bad news of Fred. How did he know about him?"

Her daughter shook her head and gazed curiously at their afflicted visitor. She put his age down at twenty-five, and she could not help thinking it a pity that so good-looking a young man should have lost his wits.

"Bade Prudence good-bye at the docks," continued Mr. Catesby, dreamily. "You drew me behind a pile of luggage, Prudence, and put your head on my shoulder. I have thought of it ever since."

Miss Truefitt did not deny it, but she bit her lips, and shot a sharp glance at him. She began to think that her pity was uncalled-for.

"I'm just going as far as the corner."

"Tell me all that's happened since I've been away," said Mr. Catesby.

Mrs. Truefitt turned to her daughter and whis-

pered. It might have been merely the effect of a guilty conscience, but the visitor thought that he caught the word "policeman."

"I'm just going as far as the corner," said Mrs. Truefitt, rising, and crossing hastily to the door.

The young man nodded affectionately and sat in doubtful consideration as the front door closed behind her. "Where is mother going?" he asked, in a voice which betrayed a little pardonable anxiety.

"Not far, I hope," said Prudence.

"I really think," said Mr. Catesby, rising—"I really think that I had better go after her. At her age——"

He walked into the small passage and put his hand on the latch. Prudence, now quite certain of his sanity, felt sorely reluctant to let such impudence go unpunished.

"Are you going?" she inquired.

"I think I'd better," said Mr. Catesby, gravely. "Dear mother——"

"You're afraid," said the girl, calmly.

Mr. Catesby coloured and his buoyancy failed him. He felt a little bit cheap.

"You are brave enough with two women," continued the girl, disdainfully; "but you had better go if you're afraid."

Mr. Catesby regarded the temptress uneasily. "Would you like me to stay?" he asked.

"I?" said Miss Truefitt, tossing her head. "No, I don't want you. Besides, you're frightened."

Mr. Catesby turned, and with a firm step made his way back to the room; Prudence, with a half-smile, took a chair near the door and regarded her prisoner with unholy triumph.

"I shouldn't like to be in your shoes," she said, agreeably; "mother has gone for a policeman."

"Bless her," said Mr. Catesby, fervently. "What had we better say to him when he comes?"

"You'll be locked up," said Prudence; "and it will serve you right for your bad behaviour."

Mr. Catesby sighed. "It's the heart," he said, gravely. "I'm not to blame, really. I saw you standing in the window, and I could see at once that you were beautiful, and good, and kind."

"I never heard of such impudence," continued Miss Truefitt.

"I surprised myself," admitted Mr. Catesby. "In the usual way I am very quiet and well-behaved, not to say shy."

Miss Truefitt looked at him scornfully. "I think that you had better stop your nonsense and go," she remarked.

"Don't you want me to be punished?" inquired the other, in a soft voice.

"I think that you had better go while you can," said the girl, and at that moment there was a heavy

knock at the front-door. Mr. Catesby, despite his assurance, changed colour; the girl eyed him in perplexity. Then she opened the small folding-doors at the back of the room.

"You're only—stupid," she whispered. "Quick! Go in there. I'll say you've gone. Keep quiet, and I'll let you out by-and-by."

She pushed him in and closed the doors. From his hiding-place he heard an animated conversation at the street-door and minute particulars as to the time which had elapsed since his departure and the direction he had taken.

"I never heard such impudence," said Mrs. Truefitt, going into the front-room and sinking into a chair after the constable had taken his departure. "I don't believe he was mad."

"Only a little weak in the head, I think," said Prudence, in a clear voice. "He was very frightened after you had gone; I don't think he will trouble us again."

"He'd better not," said Mrs. Truefitt, sharply. "I never heard of such a thing—never."

She continued to grumble, while Prudence, in a low voice, endeavoured to soothe her. Her efforts were evidently successful, as the prisoner was, after a time, surprised to hear the older woman laugh—at first gently, and then with so much enjoyment that her daughter was at some pains to restrain her. He

sat in patience until evening deepened into night, and a line of light beneath the folding-doors announced the lighting of the lamp in the front-room. By a pleasant clatter of crockery he became aware that they were at supper, and he pricked up his ears as Prudence made another reference to him.

"If he comes to-morrow night while you are out I sha'n't open the door," she said. "You'll be back by nine, I suppose."

Mrs. Truefitt assented.

"And you won't be leaving before seven," continued Prudence. "I shall be all right."

Mr. Catesby's face glowed and his eyes grew tender; Prudence was as clever as she was beautiful. The delicacy with which she had intimated the fact of the unconscious Mrs. Truefitt's absence on the following evening was beyond all praise. The only depressing thought was that such resourcefulness savoured of practice.

He sat in the darkness for so long that even the proximity of Prudence was not sufficient amends for the monotony of it, and it was not until past ten o'clock that the folding-doors were opened and he stood blinking at the girl in the glare of the lamp.

"Quick!" she whispered.

Mr. Catesby stepped into the lighted room.

"The front-door is open," whispered Prudence. "Make haste. I'll close it."

She followed him to the door; he made an ineffectual attempt to seize her hand, and the next moment was pushed gently outside and the door closed behind him. He stood a moment gazing at the house, and then hastened back to his ship.

"I'll go and put on a clean collar."

"Seven to-morrow," he murmured; "seven to-morrow. After all, there's nothing pays in this world like cheek—nothing."

He slept soundly that night, though the things that the second-engineer said to him about wasting a hard-working man's evening would have lain heavy on the

conscience of a more scrupulous man. The only thing that troubled him was the manifest intention of his friend not to let him slip through his fingers on the following evening. At last, in sheer despair at his inability to shake him off, he had to tell him that he had an appointment with a lady.

"Well, I'll come, too," said the other, glowering at him. "It's very like she'll have a friend with her; they generally do."

"I'll run round and tell her," said Catesby. "I'd have arranged it before, only I thought you didn't care about that sort of thing."

"Female society is softening," said the second-engineer. "I'll go and put on a clean collar."

Catesby watched him into his cabin and then, though it still wanted an hour to seven, hastily quitted the ship and secreted himself in the private bar of the Beehive.

He waited there until a quarter past seven, and then, adjusting his tie for about the tenth time that evening in the glass behind the bar, sallied out in the direction of No. 5.

He knocked lightly, and waited. There was no response, and he knocked again. When the fourth knock brought no response, his heart sank within him and he indulged in vain speculations as to the reasons for this unexpected hitch in the programme. He knocked again, and then the door opened sud-

denly and Prudence, with a little cry of surprise and dismay, backed into the passage.

"You!" she said, regarding him with large eyes.

Mr. Catesby bowed tenderly, and passing in closed the door behind him.

"I wanted to thank you for your kindness last night," he said, humbly.

"Very well," said Prudence; "good-bye."

Mr. Catesby smiled. "It'll take me a long time to thank you as I ought to thank you," he murmured. "And then I want to apologise; that'll take time, too."

"You had better go," said Prudence, severely; "kindness is thrown away upon you. I ought to have let you be punished."

"You are too good and kind," said the other, drifting by easy stages into the parlour.

Miss Truefitt made no reply, but following him into the room seated herself in an easy-chair and sat coldly watchful.

"How do you know what I am?" she inquired.

"Your face tells me," said the infatuated Richard. "I hope you will forgive me for my rudeness last night. It was all done on the spur of the moment."

"I am glad you are sorry," said the girl, softening.

"All the same, if I hadn't done it," pursued Mr. Catesby, "I shouldn't be sitting here talking to you now."

Miss Truefitt raised her eyes to his, and then lowered them modestly to the ground. "That is true," she said, quietly.

"And I would sooner be sitting here than anywhere," pursued Catesby. "That is," he added, rising, and taking a chair by her side, "except here."

Miss Truefitt appeared to tremble, and made as though to rise. Then she sat still and took a gentle peep at Mr. Catesby from the corner of her eye.

"I hope that you are not sorry that I am here?" said that gentleman.

Miss Truefitt hesitated. "No," she said, at last

"Are you—are you glad?" asked the modest Richard.

Miss Truefitt averted her eyes altogether. "Yes," she said, faintly.

A strange feeling of solemnity came over the triumphant Richard. He took the hand nearest to him and pressed it gently.

"I—I can hardly believe in my good luck," he murmured.

"Good luck?" said Prudence, innocently.

"Isn't it good luck to hear you say that you are glad I'm here?" said Catesby.

"You're the best judge of that," said the girl, withdrawing her hand. "It doesn't seem to me much to be pleased about."

Mr. Catesby eyed her in perplexity, and was about to address another tender remark to her when she was overcome by a slight fit of coughing. At the same moment he started at the sound of a shuffling footstep in the passage. Somebody tapped at the door.

"Yes?" said Prudence.

"Can't find the knife-powder, miss," said a harsh voice. The door was pushed open and disclosed a tall, bony woman of about forty. Her red arms were bare to the elbow, and she betrayed several evidences of a long and arduous day's charing.

"It's in the cupboard," said Prudence. "Why, what's the matter, Mrs. Porter?"

Mrs. Porter made no reply. Her mouth was wide open and she was gazing with starting eyeballs at Mr. Catesby.

"*Joe!*" she said, in a hoarse whisper. "*Joe!*"

Mr. Catesby gazed at her in chilling silence. Miss Truefitt, with an air of great surprise, glanced from one to the other.

"*Joe!*" said Mrs. Porter again. "Ain't you goin' to speak to me?"

Mr. Catesby continued to gaze at her in speechless astonishment. She skipped clumsily round the table and stood before him with her hands clasped.

"Where 'ave you been all this long time?" she demanded, in a higher key.

"You—you've made a mistake," said the bewildered Richard.

"Mistake?" wailed Mrs. Porter. "Mistake! Oh, where's your 'art?"

Before he could get out of her way she flung her arms round the horrified young man's neck and embraced him copiously. Over her bony left shoulder the frantic Richard met the ecstatic gaze of Miss Truefitt, and, in a flash, he realised the trap into which he had fallen.

"*Mrs. Porter!*" said Prudence.

"It's my 'usband, miss," said the Amazon, reluctantly releasing the flushed and dishevelled Richard; "'e left me and my five eighteen months ago. For eighteen months I 'aven't 'ad a sight of 'is blessed face."

She lifted the hem of her apron to her face and broke into discordant weeping.

"Don't cry," said Prudence, softly; "I'm sure he isn't worth it."

Mr. Catesby looked at her wanly. He was beyond further astonishment, and when Mrs. Truefitt entered the room with a laudable attempt to twist her features into an expression of surprise, he scarcely noticed her.

"It's my Joe," said Mrs. Porter, simply.

"Good gracious!" said Mrs. Truefitt. "Well, you've got him now; take care he doesn't run away from you again."

"I'll look after that, ma'am," said Mrs. Porter, with a glare at the startled Richard.

"She's very forgiving," said Prudence. "She kissed him just now."

"I'll look after that, ma'am."

"Did she, though," said the admiring Mrs. Truefitt. "I wish I'd been here."

"I can do it agin, ma'am," said the obliging Mrs. Porter.

"If you come near me again——" said the breathless Richard, stepping back a pace.

"I shouldn't force his love," said Mrs. Truefitt; "it'll come back in time, I dare say."

"I'm sure he's affectionate," said Prudence.

Mr. Catesby eyed his tormentors in silence; the faces of Prudence and her mother betokened much innocent enjoyment, but the austerity of Mrs. Porter's visage was unrelaxed.

"Better let bygones be bygones," said Mrs. Truefitt; "he'll be sorry by-and-by for all the trouble he has caused."

"He'll be ashamed of himself—if you give him time," added Prudence.

Mr. Catesby had heard enough; he took up his hat and crossed to the door.

"Take care he doesn't run away from you again," repeated Mrs. Truefitt.

"I'll see to that, ma'am," said Mrs. Porter, taking him by the arm. "Come along, Joe."

Mr. Catesby attempted to shake her off, but in vain, and he ground his teeth as he realised the absurdity of his position. A man he could have dealt with, but Mrs. Porter was invulnerable. Sooner than walk down the road with her he preferred the sallies of the parlour. He walked back to his old position by the fireplace, and stood gazing moodily at the floor.

Mrs. Truefitt tired of the sport at last. She wanted her supper, and with a significant glance at her daughter she beckoned the redoubtable and reluctant Mrs. Porter from the room. Catesby heard the kitchen-door close behind them, but he made no move. Prudence stood gazing at him in silence.

"If you want to go," she said, at last, "now is your chance."

Catesby followed her into the passage without a word, and waited quietly while she opened the door. Still silent, he put on his hat and passed out into the darkening street. He turned after a short distance for a last look at the house and, with a sudden sense of elation, saw that she was standing on the step. He hesitated, and then walked slowly back.

"Yes?" said Prudence.

"I should like to tell your mother that I am sorry," he said, in a low voice.

"It is getting late," said the girl, softly; "but, if you really wish to tell her—Mrs. Porter will not be here to-morrow night."

She stepped back into the house and the door closed behind her.

THE CHANGING NUMBERS

THE CHANGING NUMBERS

THE tall clock in the corner of the small living-room had just struck eight as Mr. Samuel Gunnill came stealthily down the winding staircase and, opening the door at the foot, stepped with an appearance of great care and humility into the room. He noticed with some anxiety that his daughter Selina was apparently engrossed in her task of attending to the plants in the window, and that no preparations whatever had been made for breakfast.

Miss Gunnill's horticultural duties seemed interminable. She snipped off dead leaves with painstaking precision, and administered water with the jealous care of a druggist compounding a prescription; then, with her back still toward him, she gave vent to a sigh far too intense in its nature to have reference to such trivialities as plants. She repeated it twice, and at the second time Mr. Gunnill, almost without his knowledge, uttered a deprecatory cough.

His daughter turned with alarming swiftness and, holding herself very upright, favoured him with a glance in which indignation and surprise were very fairly mingled.

"That white one—that one at the end," said Mr. Gunnill, with an appearance of concentrated interest, "that's my fav'rite."

Miss Gunnill put her hands together, and a look of infinite long-suffering came upon her face, but she made no reply.

"Always has been," continued Mr. Gunnill, feverishly, "from a—from a cutting."

"Bailed out," said Miss Gunnill, in a deep and thrilling voice; "bailed out at one o'clock in the morning, brought home singing loud enough for half-a-dozen, and then talking about flowers!"

Mr. Gunnill coughed again.

"I was dreaming," pursued Miss Gunnill, plaintively, "sleeping peacefully, when I was awoke by a horrible noise."

"That couldn't ha' been me," protested her father. "I was only a bit cheerful. It was Benjamin Ely's birthday yesterday, and after we left the Lion they started singing, and I just hummed to keep 'em company. I wasn't singing, mind you, only humming—when up comes that interfering Cooper and takes me off."

Miss Gunnill shivered, and with her pretty cheek in her hand sat by the window the very picture of despondency. "Why didn't he take the others?" she inquired.

"Ah!" said Mr. Gunnill, with great emphasis,

"that's what a lot more of us would like to know. P'r'aps if you'd been more polite to Mrs. Cooper, instead o' putting it about that she looked young enough to be his mother, it wouldn't have happened."

His daughter shook her head impatiently and, on Mr. Gunnill making an allusion to breakfast, expressed surprise that he had got the heart to eat anything. Mr. Gunnill pressing the point, however, she arose and began to set the table, the undue care with which she smoothed out the creases of the tablecloth, and the mathematical exactness with which she placed the various articles, all being so many extra smarts in his wound. When she finally placed on the table enough food for a dozen people he began to show signs of a little spirit.

"Ain't you going to have any?" he demanded, as Miss Gunnill resumed her seat by the window.

"*Me?*" said the girl, with a shudder. "Breakfast? The disgrace is breakfast enough for me. I couldn't eat a morsel; it would choke me."

Mr. Gunnill eyed her over the rim of his teacup. "I come down an hour ago," he said, casually, as he helped himself to some bacon.

Miss Gunnill started despite herself. "Oh!" she said, listlessly.

"And I see you making a very good breakfast all by yourself in the kitchen," continued her father, in a voice not free from the taint of triumph.

The discomfited Selina rose and stood regarding him; Mr. Gunnill, after a vain attempt to meet her gaze, busied himself with his meal.

"The idea of watching every mouthful I eat!" said Miss Gunnill, tragically; "the idea of complaining because I have some breakfast! I'd never have believed it of you, never! It's shameful! Fancy grudging your own daughter the food she eats!"

Mr. Gunnill eyed her in dismay. In his confusion he had overestimated the capacity of his mouth, and he now strove in vain to reply to this shameful perversion of his meaning. His daughter stood watching him with grief in one eye and calculation in the other, and, just as he had put himself into a position to exercise his rights of free speech, gave a pathetic sniff and walked out of the room.

She stayed indoors all day, but the necessity of establishing his innocence took Mr. Gunnill out a great deal. His neighbours, in the hope of further excitement, warmly pressed him to go to prison rather than pay a fine, and instanced the example of an officer in the Salvation Army, who, in very different circumstances, had elected to take that course. Mr. Gunnill assured them that only his known antipathy to the army, and the fear of being regarded as one of its followers, prevented him from doing so. He paid instead a fine of ten shillings, and after

listening to a sermon, in which his silver hairs served as the text, was permitted to depart.

His feeling against Police-constable Cooper in-

"The constable watched him with the air of a proprietor."

creased with the passing of the days. The constable watched him with the air of a proprietor, and Mrs. Cooper's remark that "her husband had had his eye

upon him for a long time, and that he had better be careful for the future," was faithfully retailed to him within half an hour of its utterance. Convivial friends counted his cups for him; teetotal friends more than hinted that Cooper was in the employ of his good angel.

Miss Gunnill's two principal admirers had an arduous task to perform. They had to attribute Mr. Gunnill's disaster to the vindictiveness of Cooper, and at the same time to agree with his daughter that it served him right. Between father and daughter they had a difficult time, Mr. Gunnill's sensitiveness having been much heightened by his troubles.

"Cooper ought not to have taken you," said Herbert Sims for the fiftieth time.

"He must ha' seen you like it dozens o' times before," said Ted Drill, who, in his determination not to be outdone by Mr. Sims, was not displaying his usual judgment. "Why didn't he take you then? That's what you ought to have asked the magistrate."

"I don't understand you," said Mr. Gunnill, with an air of cold dignity.

"Why," said Mr. Drill, "what I mean is—look at that night, for instance, when——"

He broke off suddenly, even his enthusiasm not being proof against the extraordinary contortions of visage in which Mr. Gunnill was indulging.

"When?" prompted Selina and Mr. Sims together. Mr. Gunnill, after first daring him with his eye, followed suit.

"That night at the Crown," said Mr. Drill, awkwardly. "You know; when you thought that Joe Baggs was the landlord. You tell 'em; you tell it best. I've roared over it."

"I don't know what you're driving at," said the harassed Mr. Gunnill, bitterly.

"*H'm!*" said Mr. Drill, with a weak laugh. "I've been mixing you up with somebody else."

Mr. Gunnill, obviously relieved, said that he ought to be more careful, and pointed out, with some feeling, that a lot of mischief was caused that way.

"Cooper wants a lesson, that's what he wants," said Mr. Sims, valiantly. "He'll get his head broke one of these days."

Mr. Gunnill acquiesced. "I remember when I was on the *Peewit*," he said, musingly, "one time when we were lying at Cardiff, there was a policeman there run one of our chaps in, and two nights afterward another of our chaps pushed the policeman down in the mud and ran off with his staff and his helmet."

Miss Gunnill's eyes glistened. "What happened?" she inquired.

"He had to leave the force," replied her father; "he couldn't stand the disgrace of it. The chap that

pushed him over was quite a little chap, too. About the size of Herbert here."

Mr. Sims started.

"Very much like him in face, too," pursued Mr. Gunnill; "daring chap he was."

Miss Gunnill sighed. "I wish he lived in Littlestow," she said, slowly. "I'd give anything to take that horrid Mrs. Cooper down a bit. Cooper would be the laughing-stock of the town."

Messrs. Sims and Drill looked unhappy. It was hard to have to affect an attitude of indifference in the face of Miss Gunnill's lawless yearnings; to stand before her as respectable and law-abiding cravens. Her eyes, large and sorrowful, dwelt on them both.

"If I—I only get a chance at Cooper!" murmured Mr. Sims, vaguely.

To his surprise, Mr. Gunnill started up from his chair and, gripping his hand, shook it fervently. He looked round, and Selina was regarding him with a glance so tender that he lost his head completely. Before he had recovered he had pledged himself to lay the helmet and truncheon of the redoubtable Mr. Cooper at the feet of Miss Gunnill; exact date not specified.

"Of course, I shall have to wait my opportunity," he said, at last.

"You wait as long as you like, my boy," said the thoughtless Mr. Gunnill.

Mr. Sims thanked him.

"Wait till Cooper's an old man," urged Mr. Drill.

Miss Gunnill, secretly disappointed at the lack of boldness and devotion on the part of the latter gentleman, eyed his stalwart frame indignantly and accused him of trying to make Mr. Sims as timid as himself. She turned to the valiant Sims and made herself so agreeable to that daring blade that Mr. Drill, a prey to violent jealousy, bade the company a curt good-night and withdrew.

He stayed away for nearly a week, and then one evening as he approached the house, carrying a carpet-bag, he saw the door just opening to admit the fortunate Herbert. He quickened his pace and arrived just in time to follow him in. Mr. Sims, who bore under his arm a brown-paper parcel, seemed somewhat embarrassed at seeing him, and after a brief greeting walked into the room, and with a triumphant glance at Mr. Gunnill and Selina placed his burden on the table.

"You—you ain't got it?" said Mr. Gunnill, leaning forward.

"How foolish of you to run such a risk!" said Selina.

"I brought it for Miss Gunnill," said the young man, simply. He unfastened the parcel, and to the astonishment of all present revealed a policeman's helmet and a short boxwood truncheon.

"You—you're a wonder," said the gloating Mr. Gunnill. "Look at it, Ted!"

Mr. Drill *was* looking at it; it may be doubted whether the head of Mr. Cooper itself could have caused him more astonishment. Then his eyes sought

" He saw the door just opening to admit the fortunate Herbert."

those of Mr. Sims, but that gentleman was gazing tenderly at the gratified but shocked Selina.

"How ever did you do it?" inquired Mr. Gunnill.

"Came behind him and threw him down," said Mr. Sims, nonchalantly. "He was that scared I be-

lieve I could have taken his boots as well if I'd wanted them."

Mr. Gunnill patted him on the back. "I fancy I can see him running bare-headed through the town calling for help," he said, smiling.

Mr. Sims shook his head. "Like as not it'll be kept quiet for the credit of the force," he said, slowly, "unless, of course, they discover who did it."

A slight shade fell on the good-humoured countenance of Mr. Gunnill, but it was chased away almost immediately by Sims reminding him of the chaff of Cooper's brother-constables.

"And you might take the others away," said Mr. Gunnill, brightening; "you might keep on doing it."

Mr. Sims said doubtfully that he might, but pointed out that Cooper would probably be on his guard for the future.

"Yes, you've done your share," said Miss Gunnill, with a half-glance at Mr. Drill, who was still gazing in a bewildered fashion at the trophies. "You can come into the kitchen and help me draw some beer if you like."

Mr. Sims followed her joyfully, and reaching down a jug for her watched her tenderly as she drew the beer. All women love valour, but Miss Gunnill, gazing sadly at the slight figure of Mr. Sims, could not help wishing that Mr. Drill possessed a little of his spirit.

She had just finished her task when a tremendous bumping noise was heard in the living-room, and the plates on the dresser were nearly shaken off their shelves.

"What's that?" she cried.

"Mr. Sims watched her tenderly as she drew the beer."

They ran to the room and stood aghast in the doorway at the spectacle of Mr. Gunnill, with his clenched fists held tightly by his side, bounding into the air with all the grace of a trained acrobat, while Mr. Drill encouraged him from an easy-chair. Mr.

Gunnill smiled broadly as he met their astonished gaze, and with a final bound kicked something along the floor and subsided into his seat panting.

Mr. Sims, suddenly enlightened, uttered a cry of dismay and, darting under the table, picked up what had once been a policeman's helmet. Then he snatched a partially consumed truncheon from the fire, and stood white and trembling before the astonished Mr. Gunnill.

"What's the matter?" inquired the latter.

"You—you've spoilt 'em," gasped Mr. Sims.

"What of it?" said Mr. Gunnill, staring.

"I was—going to take 'em away," stammered Mr. Sims.

"Well, they'll be easier to carry now," said Mr. Drill, simply.

Mr. Sims glanced at him sharply, and then, to the extreme astonishment of Mr. Gunnill, snatched up the relics and, wrapping them up in the paper, dashed out of the house. Mr. Gunnill turned a look of blank inquiry upon Mr. Drill.

"It wasn't Cooper's number on the helmet," said that gentleman.

"*Eh?*" shouted Mr. Gunnill.

"How do you know?" inquired Selina.

"I just happened to notice," replied Mr. Drill.

He reached down as though to take up the carpet-bag which he had placed by the side of his chair, and

then, apparently thinking better of it, leaned back in his seat and eyed Mr. Gunnill.

"Do you mean to tell me," said the latter, "that he's been and upset the wrong man?"

Mr. Drill shook his head. "That's the puzzle," he said, softly.

He smiled over at Miss Gunnill, but that young lady, who found him somewhat mysterious, looked away and frowned. Her father sat and exhausted conjecture, his final conclusion being that Mr. Sims had attacked the first policeman that had come in his way and was now suffering the agonies of remorse.

He raised his head sharply at the sound of hurried footsteps outside. There was a smart rap at the street door, then the handle was turned, and the next moment, to the dismay of all present, the red and angry face of one of Mr. Cooper's brother-constables was thrust into the room.

Mr. Gunnill gazed at it in helpless fascination. The body of the constable garbed in plain clothes followed the face and, standing before him in a menacing fashion, held out a broken helmet and staff.

"Have you seen these afore?" he inquired, in a terrible voice.

"No," said Mr. Gunnill, with an attempt at surprise. "What are they?"

"I'll tell you what they are," said Police-constable Jenkins, ferociously; "they're my helmet and

truncheon. You've been spoiling His Majesty's property, and you'll be locked up."

"*Yours?*" said the astonished Mr. Gunnill.

"I lent 'em to young Sims, just for a joke," said the constable. "I felt all along I was doing a silly thing."

"It's no joke," said Mr. Gunnill, severely. "I'll tell young Herbert what I think of him trying to deceive me like that."

"Never mind about deceiving," interrupted the constable. "What are you going to do about it?"

"What are you?" inquired Mr. Gunnill, hardily. "It seems to me it's between you and him; you'll very likely be dismissed from the force, and all through trying to deceive. I wash my hands of it."

"You'd no business to lend it," said Drill, interrupting the constable's indignant retort; "especially for Sims to pretend that he had stolen it from Cooper. It's a roundabout sort of thing, but you can't tell of Mr. Gunnill without getting into trouble yourself."

"I shall have to put up with that," said the constable, desperately; "it's got to be explained. It's my day-helmet, too, and the night one's as shabby as can be. Twenty years in the force and never a mark against my name till now."

"If you'd only keep quiet a bit instead of talking so much," said Mr. Drill, who had been doing some

hard thinking, "I might be able to help you, p'r'aps."

"How?" inquired the constable.

"Help him if you can, Ted," said Mr. Gunnill, eagerly; "we ought all to help others when we get a chance."

Mr. Drill sat bolt upright and looked very wise.

He took the smashed helmet from the table and examined it carefully. It was broken in at least half-a-dozen places, and he laboured in vain to push it into shape. He might as well have tried to make a silk hat out of a concertina. The only thing that had escaped injury was the metal plate with the number.

"Why don't you mend it?" he inquired, at last.

"*Mend* it?" shouted the incensed Mr. Jenkins. "Why don't you?"

"I think I could," said Mr. Drill, slowly; "give me half an hour in the kitchen and I'll try."

"Have as long as you like," said Mr. Gunnill.

"And I shall want some glue, and Miss Gunnill, and some tin-tacks," said Drill.

"What do you want me for?" inquired Selina.

"To hold the things for me," replied Mr. Drill.

Miss Gunnill tossed her head, but after a little demur consented; and Drill, ignoring the impatience of the constable, picked up his bag and led the way into the kitchen. Messrs. Gunnill and Jenkins, left behind in the living-room, sought for some neutral

topic of discourse, but in vain; conversation would revolve round hard labour and lost pensions.

From the kitchen came sounds of hammering,

"From the kitchen came sounds of hammering."

then a loud "*Ooh!*" from Miss Gunnill, followed by a burst of laughter and a clapping of hands. Mr. Jenkins shifted in his seat and exchanged glances with Mr. Gunnill.

"He's a clever fellow," said that gentleman, hopefully. "You should hear him imitate a canary; lifelike it is."

Mr. Jenkins was about to make a hasty and obvious rejoinder, when the kitchen door opened and Selina emerged, followed by Drill. The snarl which the constable had prepared died away in a murmur of astonishment as he took the helmet. It looked as good as ever.

He turned it over and over in amaze, and looked in vain for any signs of the disastrous cracks. It was stiff and upright. He looked at the number: it was his own. His eyes round with astonishment he tried it on, and then his face relaxed.

"It don't fit as well as it did," he said.

"Well, upon my word, some people are never satisfied," said the indignant Drill. "There isn't another man in England could have done it better."

"I'm not grumbling," said the constable, hastily; "it's a wonderful piece o' work. Wonderful! I can't even see where it was broke. How on earth did you do it?"

Drill shook his head. "It's a secret process," he said, slowly. "I might want to go into the hat

trade some day, and I'm not going to give things away."

"Quite right," said Mr. Jenkins. "Still—well, it's a marvel, that's what it is; a fair marvel. If you take my advice you'll go in the hat trade to-morrow, my lad."

"I'm not surprised," said Mr. Gunnill, whose face as he spoke was a map of astonishment. "Not a bit. I've seen him do more surprising things than that. Have a go at the staff now, Teddy."

"I'll see about it," said Mr. Drill, modestly. "I can't do impossibilities. You leave it here, Mr. Jenkins, and we'll talk about it later on."

Mr. Jenkins, still marvelling over his helmet, assented, and, after another reference to the possibilities in the hat trade to a man with a born gift for repairs, wrapped his property in a piece of newspaper and departed, whistling.

"Ted," said Mr. Gunnill, impressively, as he sank into his chair with a sigh of relief. "How you done it I don't know. It's a surprise even to me."

"He is very clever," said Selina, with a kind smile.

Mr. Drill turned pale, and then, somewhat emboldened by praise from such a quarter, dropped into a chair by her side and began to talk in low tones. The grateful Mr. Gunnill, more relieved than he cared to confess, thoughtfully closed his eyes.

"I didn't think all along that you'd let Herbert outdo you," said Selina.

"I want to outdo *him*," said Mr. Drill, in a voice of much meaning.

Miss Gunnill cast down her eyes and Mr. Drill had just plucked up sufficient courage to take her hand when footsteps stopped at the house, the handle of the door was turned, and, for the second time that evening, the inflamed visage of Mr. Jenkins confronted the company.

"Don't tell me it's a failure," said Mr. Gunnill, starting from his chair. "You must have been handling it roughly. It was as good as new when you took it away."

Mr. Jenkins waved him away and fixed his eyes upon Drill.

"You think you're mighty clever, I dare say," he said, grimly; "but I can put two and two together. I've just heard of it."

"Heard of two and two?" said Drill, looking puzzled.

"I don't want any of your nonsense," said Mr. Jenkins. "I'm not on duty now, but I warn you not to say anything that may be used against you."

"I never do," said Mr. Drill, piously.

"Somebody threw a handful o' flour in poor Cooper's face a couple of hours ago," said Mr. Jenkins, watching him closely, "and while he was getting it out of his eyes they upset him and made off with

his helmet and truncheon. I just met Brown and he says Cooper's been going on like a madman."

"By Jove! it's a good job I mended your helmet for you," said Mr. Drill, "or else they might have suspected you."

Mr. Jenkins stared at him. "I know who did do it," he said, significantly.

"Herbert Sims?" guessed Mr. Drill, in a stage whisper.

"You'll be one o' the first to know," said Mr. Jenkins, darkly; "he'll be arrested to-morrow. Fancy the impudence of it! It's shocking."

Mr. Drill whistled. "Well, don't let that little affair o' yours with Sims be known," he said, quietly. "Have that kept quiet—*if you can.*"

Mr. Jenkins started as though he had been stung. In the joy of a case he had overlooked one or two things. He turned and regarded the young man wistfully.

"Don't call on me as a witness, that's all," continued Mr. Drill. "I never was a mischief-maker, and I shouldn't like to have to tell how you lent your helmet to Sims so that he could pretend he had knocked Cooper down and taken it from him."

"Wouldn't look at all well," said Mr. Gunnill, nodding his head sagely.

Mr. Jenkins breathed hard and looked from one to the other. It was plain that it was no good re-

minding them that he had not had a case for five years.

"When I say that I know who did it," he said, slowly, "I mean that I have my suspicions."

" ' Don't call on me as a witness, that's all,' continued Mr. Drill."

"Ah!" said Mr. Drill, "that's a very different thing."

"Nothing like the same," said Mr. Gunnill, pouring the constable a glass of ale.

Mr. Jenkins drank it and smacked his lips feebly.

"Sims needn't know anything about that helmet being repaired," he said at last.

"Certainly not," said everybody.

Mr. Jenkins sighed and turned to Drill.

"It's no good spoiling the ship for a ha'porth o' tar," he said, with a faint suspicion of a wink.

"No," said Drill, looking puzzled.

"Anything that's worth doing at all is worth doing well," continued the constable, "and while I'm drinking another glass with Mr. Gunnill here, suppose you go into the kitchen with that useful bag o' yours and finish repairing my truncheon?"

THE PERSECUTION OF BOB PRETTY

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THE old man sat on his accustomed bench outside the Cauliflower. A generous measure of beer stood in a blue and white jug by his elbow, and little wisps of smoke curled slowly upward from the bowl of his churchwarden pipe. The knapsacks of two young men lay where they were flung on the table, and the owners, taking a noon-tide rest, turned a polite, if bored, ear to the reminiscences of grateful old age.

Poaching, said the old man, who had tried topics ranging from early turnips to horseshoeing—poaching ain't wot it used to be in these 'ere parts. Nothing is like it used to be, poaching nor anything else; but that there man you might ha' noticed as went out about ten minutes ago and called me "Old Truthfulness" as 'e passed is the worst one I know. Bob Pretty 'is name is, and of all the sly, artful, deceiving men that ever lived in Claybury 'e is the worst—never did a honest day's work in 'is life and never wanted the price of a glass of ale.

Bob Pretty's worst time was just after old Squire

Brown died. The old squire couldn't afford to preserve much, but by-and-by a gentleman with plenty o' money, from London, named Rockett, took 'is place and things began to look up. Pheasants was 'is

"Poaching," said the old man, "ain't wot it used to be in these 'ere parts."

favourites, and 'e spent no end o' money rearing of 'em, but anything that could be shot at suited 'im, too.

He started by sneering at the little game that Squire Brown 'ad left, but all 'e could do didn't seem

to make much difference; things disappcared in a most eggstrordinary way, and the keepers went pretty near crazy, while the things the squire said about Claybury and Claybury men was disgraceful.

Everybody knew as it was Bob Pretty and one or two of 'is mates from other places, but they couldn't prove it. They couldn't catch 'im nohow, and at last the squire 'ad two keepers set off to watch 'im by night and by day.

Bob Pretty wouldn't believe it; he said 'e couldn't. And even when it was pointed out to 'im that Keeper Lewis was follering of 'im he said that it just 'appened he was going the same way, that was all. And sometimes 'e'd get up in the middle of the night and go for a fifteen-mile walk 'cos 'e'd got the toothache, and Mr. Lewis, who 'adn't got it, had to tag along arter 'im till he was fit to drop. O' course, it was one keeper the less to look arter the game, and by-and-by the squire see that and took 'im off.

All the same they kept a pretty close watch on Bob, and at last one arternoon they sprang out on 'im as he was walking past Gray's farm, and asked him wot it was he 'ad in his pockets.

"That's my bisness, Mr. Lewis," ses Bob Pretty.

Mr. Smith, the other keeper, passed 'is hands over Bob's coat and felt something soft and bulgy.

"You take your 'ands off of me," ses Bob; "you don't know 'ow partikler I am."

He jerked 'imself away, but they caught 'old of 'im agin, and Mr. Lewis put 'is hand in his inside pocket and pulled out two brace o' partridges.

"You'll come along of us," he ses, catching 'im by the arm.

"We've been looking for you a long time," ses Keeper Smith, "and it's a pleasure for us to 'ave your company."

Bob Pretty said 'e wouldn't go, but they forced 'im along and took 'im all the way to Cudford, four miles off, so that Policeman White could lock 'im up for the night. Mr. White was a'most as pleased as the keepers, and 'e warned Bob solemn not to speak becos all 'e said would be used agin 'im.

"Never mind about that," ses Bob Pretty. "I've got a clear conscience, and talking can't 'urt me. I'm very glad to see you, Mr. White; if these two clever, experienced keepers hadn't brought me I should 'ave looked you up myself. They've been and stole my partridges."

Them as was standing round laughed, and even Policeman White couldn't 'elp giving a little smile.

"There's nothing to laugh at," ses Bob, 'olding his 'ead up. "It's a fine thing when a working man —a 'ardworking man—can't take home a little game for 'is family without being stopped and robbed."

"I s'pose they flew into your pocket?" ses Policeman White.

"No, they didn't," ses Bob. "I'm not going to tell any lies about it; I put 'em there. The partridges in my inside coat-pocket and the bill in my waistcoat-pocket."

"The *bill?*" ses Keeper Lewis, staring at 'im.

"Yes, the bill," ses Bob Pretty, staring back at 'im; "the bill from Mr. Keen, the poulterer, at Wickham."

He fetched it out of 'is pocket and showed it to Mr. White, and the keepers was like madmen a'most 'cos it was plain to see that Bob Pretty 'ad been and bought them partridges just for to play a game on 'em.

"I was curious to know wot they tasted like," he ses to the policeman. "Worst of it is, I don't s'pose my pore wife'll know 'ow to cook 'em."

"You get off 'ome," ses Policeman White, staring at 'im.

"But ain't I goin' to be locked up?" ses Bob. "'Ave I been brought all this way just to 'ave a little chat with a policeman I don't like."

"You go 'ome," ses Policeman White, handing the partridges back to 'im.

"All right," ses Bob, "and I may 'ave to call you to witness that these 'ere two men laid hold o' me and tried to steal my partridges. I shall go up and see my loryer about it."

He walked off 'ome with his 'ead up as high as 'e

could hold it, and the airs 'e used to give 'imself arter this was terrible for to behold. He got 'is eldest boy to write a long letter to the squire about it, saying that 'e'd overlook it this time, but 'e couldn't promise for the future. Wot with Bob Pretty on one side and Squire Rockett on the other, them two keepers' lives was 'ardly worth living.

Then the squire got a head-keeper named Cutts, a man as was said to know more about the ways of poachers than they did themselves. He was said to 'ave cleared out all the poachers for miles round the place 'e came from, and pheasants could walk into people's cottages and not be touched.

He was a sharp-looking man, tall and thin, with screwed-up eyes and a little red beard. The second day 'e came 'e was up here at this 'ere Cauliflower, having a pint o' beer and looking round at the chaps as he talked to the landlord. The odd thing was that men who'd never taken a hare or a pheasant in their lives could 'ardly meet 'is eye, while Bob Pretty stared at 'im as if 'e was a wax-works.

"I 'ear you 'ad a little poaching in these parts afore I came," ses Mr. Cutts to the landlord.

"I think I 'ave 'eard something o' the kind," ses the landlord, staring over his 'ead with a far-away look in 'is eyes.

"You won't hear of much more," ses the keeper. "I've invented a new way of catching the dirty ras-

cals; afore I came 'ere I caught all the poachers on three estates. I clear 'em out just like a ferret clears out rats."

"Sort o' man-trap?" ses the landlord.

"Ah, that's tellings," ses Mr. Cutts.

"'I shall 'ave 'em afore long,' ses Mr. Cutts."

"Well, I 'ope you'll catch 'em here," ses Bob Pretty; "there's far too many of 'em about for my liking. Far too many."

"I shall 'ave 'em afore long," ses Mr. Cutts, nodding his 'ead.

"Your good 'ealth," ses Bob Pretty, holding up 'is

mug. "We've been wanting a man like you for a long time."

"I don't want any of your impidence, my man," ses the keeper. "I've 'eard about you, and nothing good either. You be careful."

"I am careful," ses Bob, winking at the others. "I 'ope you'll catch all them low poaching chaps; they give the place a bad name, and I'm a'most afraid to go out arter dark for fear of meeting 'em."

Peter Gubbins and Sam Jones began to laugh, but Bob Pretty got angry with 'em and said he didn't see there was anything to laugh at. He said that poaching was a disgrace to their native place, and instead o' laughing they ought to be thankful to Mr. Cutts for coming to do away with it all.

"Any help I can give you shall be given cheerful," he ses to the keeper.

"When I want your help I'll ask you for it," ses Mr. Cutts.

"Thankee," ses Bob Pretty. "I on'y 'ope I sha'n't get my face knocked about like yours 'as been, that's all; 'cos my wife's so partikler."

"Wot d'ye mean?" ses Mr. Cutts, turning on him. "My face ain't been knocked about."

"Oh, I beg your pardin," ses Bob; "I didn't know it was natural."

Mr. Cutts went black in the face a'most and stared at Bob Pretty as if 'e was going to eat 'im, and Bob

stared back, looking fust at the keeper's nose and then at 'is eyes and mouth, and then at 'is nose agin.

"You'll know me agin, I s'pose?" ses Mr. Cutts, at last.

"Yes," ses Bob, smiling; "I should know you a mile off—on the darkest night."

"We shall see," ses Mr. Cutts, taking up 'is beer and turning 'is back on him. "Those of us as live the longest'll see the most."

"I'm glad I've lived long enough to see 'im," ses Bob to Bill Chambers. "I feel more satisfied with *myself* now."

Bill Chambers coughed, and Mr. Cutts, arter finishing 'is beer, took another look at Bob Pretty, and went off boiling a'most.

The trouble he took to catch Bob Pretty arter that you wouldn't believe, and all the time the game seemed to be simply melting away, and Squire Rockett was finding fault with 'im all day long. He was worn to a shadder a'most with watching, and Bob Pretty seemed to be more prosperous than ever.

Sometimes Mr. Cutts watched in the plantations, and sometimes 'e hid 'imself near Bob's house, and at last one night, when 'e was crouching behind the fence of Frederick Scott's front garden, 'e saw Bob Pretty come out of 'is house and, arter a careful look round, walk up the road. He held 'is breath as Bob

passed 'im, and was just getting up to foller 'im when Bob stopped and walked slowly back agin, sniffing.

"Wot a delicious smell o' roses!" he ses, out loud.

He stood in the middle o' the road nearly opposite where the keeper was hiding, and sniffed so that you could ha' 'eard him the other end o' the village.

"It can't be roses," he ses, in a puzzled voice, "becos there ain't no roses hereabouts, and, besides, it's late for 'em. It must be Mr. Cutts, the clever new keeper."

He put his 'ead over the fence and bid 'im good evening, and said wot a fine night for a stroll it was, and asked 'im whether 'e was waiting for Frederick Scott's aunt. Mr. Cutts didn't answer 'im a word; 'e was pretty near bursting with passion. He got up and shook 'is fist in Bob Pretty's face, and then 'e went off stamping down the road as if 'e was going mad.

And for a time Bob Pretty seemed to 'ave all the luck on 'is side. Keeper Lewis got rheumatic fever, which 'e put down to sitting about night arter night in damp places watching for Bob, and, while 'e was in the thick of it, with the doctor going every day, Mr. Cutts fell in getting over a fence and broke 'is leg. Then all the work fell on Keeper Smith, and to 'ear 'im talk you'd think that rheumatic fever and broken legs was better than anything else in the world. He asked the squire for 'elp, but the squire

wouldn't give it to 'im, and he kept telling 'im wot a feather in 'is cap it would be if 'e did wot the other two couldn't do, and caught Bob Pretty. It was all very well, but, as Smith said, wot 'e wanted was feathers in 'is piller, instead of 'aving to snatch a bit o' sleep in 'is chair or sitting down with his 'ead agin a tree. When I tell you that 'e fell asleep in this public-'ouse one night while the landlord was drawing a pint o' beer he 'ad ordered, you'll know wot 'e suffered.

O' course, all this suited Bob Pretty as well as could be, and 'e was that good-tempered 'e'd got a nice word for everybody, and when Bill Chambers told 'im 'e was foolhardy 'e only laughed and said 'e knew wot 'e was about.

But the very next night 'e had reason to remember Bill Chambers's words. He was walking along Farmer Hall's field—the one next to the squire's plantation—and, so far from being nervous, 'e was actually a-whistling. He'd got a sack over 'is shoulder, loaded as full as it could be, and 'e 'ad just stopped to light 'is pipe when three men burst out o' the plantation and ran toward 'im as 'ard as they could run.

Bob Pretty just gave one look and then 'e dropped 'is pipe and set off like a hare. It was no good dropping the sack, because Smith, the keeper, 'ad recognised 'im and called 'im by name, so 'e just put 'is

teeth together and did the best he could, and there's no doubt that if it 'adn't ha' been for the sack 'e could 'ave got clear away.

As it was, 'e ran for pretty near a mile, and they

"Three men burst out o' the plantation."

could 'ear 'im breathing like a pair o' bellows; but at last 'e saw that the game was up. He just managed to struggle as far as Farmer Pinnock's pond, and then, waving the sack round his 'ead, 'e flung it into the middle of it, and fell down gasping for breath.

"Got—you—this time—Bob Pretty," ses one o' the men, as they came up.

"Wot—*Mr. Cutts?*" ses Bob, with a start.

"That's me, my man," ses the keeper.

"Why—I thought—you was——. Is that *Mr. Lewis?* It can't be."

"That's me," ses Keeper Lewis. "We both got well sudden-like, Bob Pretty, when we 'eard you was out. You ain't so sharp as you thought you was."

Bob Pretty sat still, getting 'is breath back and doing a bit o' thinking at the same time.

"You give me a start," he ses, at last. "I thought you was both in bed, and, knowing 'ow hard worked Mr. Smith 'as been, I just came round to 'elp 'im keep watch like. I promised to 'elp you, Mr. Cutts, if you remember."

"Wot was that you threw in the pond just now?" ses Mr. Cutts.

"A sack," ses Bob Pretty; "a sack I found in Farmer Hall's field. It felt to me as though it might 'ave birds in it, so I picked it up, and I was

just on my way to your 'ouse with it, Mr. Cutts, when you started arter me."

"Ah!" ses the keeper, "and wot did you run for?"

Bob Pretty tried to laugh. "Becos I thought it was the poachers arter me," he ses. "It seems ridikilous, don't it?"

"Yes, it does," ses Lewis.

"I thought you'd know me a mile off," ses Mr. Cutts. "I should ha' thought the smell o' roses would ha' told you I was near."

Bob Pretty scratched 'is 'ead and looked at 'im out of the corner of 'is eye, but he 'adn't got any answer. Then 'e sat biting his finger-nails and thinking while the keepers stood argyfying as to who should take 'is clothes off and go into the pond arter the pheasants. It was a very cold night and the pond was pretty deep in places, and none of 'em seemed anxious.

"Make 'im go in for it," ses Lewis, looking at Bob; "'e chucked it in."

"On'y becos I thought you was poachers," ses Bob. "I'm sorry to 'ave caused so much trouble."

"Well, you go in and get it out," ses Lewis, who pretty well guessed who'd 'ave to do it if Bob didn't. "It'll look better for you, too."

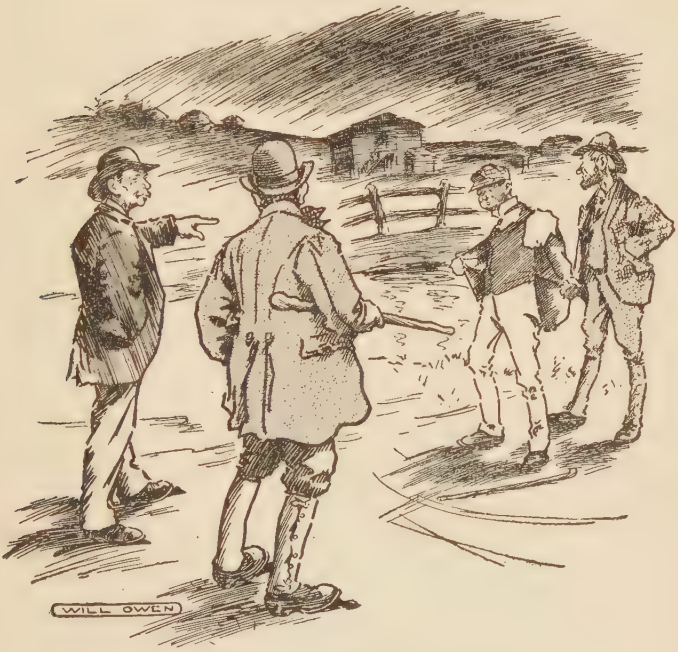
"I've got my defence all right," ses Bob Pretty. "I ain't set a foot on the squire's preserves, and I found this sack a 'undred yards away from it."

"Don't waste more time," ses Mr. Cutts to Lewis.

"Off with your clothes and in with you. Anybody'd think you was afraid of a little cold water."

"Whereabouts did 'e pitch it in?" ses Lewis.

Bob Pretty pointed with 'is finger exactly where 'e



"Bob Pretty pointed with 'is finger."

thought it was, but they wouldn't listen to 'im, and then Lewis, arter twice saying wot a bad cold he'd got, took 'is coat off very slow and careful.

"I wouldn't mind going in to oblige you," ses Bob

Pretty, "but the pond is so full o' them cold, slimy efts; I don't fancy them crawling up agin me, and, besides that, there's such a lot o' deep holes in it. And wotever you do don't put your 'ead under; you know 'ow foul that water is."

Keeper Lewis pretended not to listen to 'im. He took off 'is clothes very slowly and then 'e put one foot in and stood shivering, although Smith, who felt the water with his 'and, said it was quite warm. Then Lewis put the other foot in and began to walk about careful, 'arf-way up to 'is knees.

"I can't find it," he ses, with 'is teeth chattering.

"You 'aven't looked," ses Mr. Cutts; "walk about more; you can't expect to find it all at once. Try the middle."

Lewis tried the middle, and 'e stood there up to 'is neck, feeling about with his foot and saying things out loud about Bob Pretty, and other things under 'is breath about Mr. Cutts.

"Well, I'm going off 'ome," ses Bob Pretty, getting up. "I'm too tender-'arted to stop and see a man drownded."

"You stay 'ere," ses Mr. Cutts, catching 'old of him.

"Wot for?" ses Bob; "you've got no right to keep me 'ere."

"Catch 'old of 'im, Joe," ses Mr. Cutts, quick-like.

Smith caught 'old of his other arm, and Lewis left off trying to find the sack to watch the struggle. Bob Pretty fought 'ard, and once or twice 'e nearly tumbled Mr. Cutts into the pond, but at last 'e gave in and lay down panting and talking about 'is loryer. Smith 'eld him down on the ground while Mr. Cutts kept pointing out places with 'is finger for Lewis to walk to. The last place 'e pointed to wanted a much taller man, but it wasn't found out till too late, and the fuss Keeper Lewis made when 'e could speak agin was terrible.

"You'd better come out," ses Mr. Cutts; "you ain't doing no good. We know where they are and we'll watch the pond till daylight—that is, unless Smith 'ud like to 'ave a try."

"It's pretty near daylight now, I think," ses Smith.

Lewis came out and ran up and down to dry 'imself, and finished off on 'is pocket-'andkerchief, and then with 'is teeth chattering 'e began to dress 'imself. He got 'is shirt on, and then 'e stood turning over 'is clothes as if 'e was looking for something.

"Never mind about your stud now," ses Mr. Cutts; "hurry up and dress."

"*Stud?*" ses Lewis, very snappish. "I'm looking for my trowsis."

"Your trowsis?" ses Smith, 'elping 'im look.

"I put all my clothes together," ses Lewis, a'most

shouting. "Where are they? I'm 'arf perished with cold. Where are they?"

"He 'ad 'em on this evening," ses Bob Pretty, "'cos I remember noticing 'em."

"They must be somewhere about," ses Mr. Cutts; "why don't you use your eyes?"

He walked up and down, peering about, and as for Lewis he was 'opping round 'arf crazy.

"I wonder," ses Bob Pretty, in a thoughtful voice, to Smith—"I wonder whether you or Mr. Cutts kicked 'em in the pond while you was struggling with me. Come to think of it, I seem to remember 'earing a splash."

"He's done it, Mr. Cutts," ses Smith; "never mind, it'll go all the 'arder with 'im."

"But I do mind," ses Lewis, shouting. "I'll be even with you for this, Bob Pretty. I'll make you feel it. You wait till I've done with you. You'll get a month extra for this, you see if you don't."

"Don't you mind about me," ses Bob; "you run off 'ome and cover up them legs of yours. I found that sack, so my conscience is clear."

Lewis put on 'is coat and waistcoat and set off, and Mr. Cutts and Smith, arter feeling about for a dry place, set theirselves down and began to smoke.

"Look 'ere," ses Bob Pretty, "I'm not going to sit 'ere all night to please you; I'm going off 'ome. If you want me you'll know where to find me."

"You stay where you are," ses Mr. Cutts. "We ain't going to let you out of our sight."

"Very well, then, you take me 'ome," ses Bob. "I'm not going to catch my death o' cold sitting 'ere. I'm not used to being out of a night like you are. I was brought up respectable."

"I dare say," ses Mr. Cutts. "Take you 'ome, and then 'ave one o' your mates come and get the sack while we're away."

Then Bob Pretty lost 'is temper, and the things 'e said about Mr. Cutts wasn't fit for Smith to 'ear. He threw 'imself down at last full length on the ground and sulked till the day broke.

Keeper Lewis was there a'most as soon as it was light, with some long hay-rakes he'd borrowed, and I should think that pretty near 'arf the folks in Claybury 'ad turned up to see the fun. Mrs. Pretty was crying and wringing 'er 'ands; but most folks seemed to be rather pleased that Bob 'ad been caught at last.

In next to no time 'arf-a-dozen rakes was at work, and the things they brought out o' that pond you wouldn't believe. The edge of it was all littered with rusty tin pails and saucepans and such-like, and by-and-by Lewis found the things he'd 'ad to go 'ome without a few hours afore, but they didn't seem to find that sack, and Bob Pretty, wot was talking to 'is wife, began to look 'opeful.

But just then the squire came riding up with two

friends as was staying with 'im, and he offered a reward of five shillings to the man wot found it. Three or four of 'em waded in up to their middle then and raked their 'ardest, and at last Henery Walker give a cheer and brought it to the side, all heavy with water.

"That's the sack I found, sir," ses Bob, starting up. "It wasn't on your land at all, but on the field next to it. I'm an honest, 'ardworking man, and I've never been in trouble afore. Ask anybody 'ere and they'll tell you the same."

Squire Rockett took no notice of 'im. "Is that the sack?" he asks, turning to Mr. Cutts.

"That's the one, sir," ses Mr. Cutts. "I'd swear to it anywhere."

"You'd swear a man's life away," ses Bob. "'Ow can you swear to it when it was dark?"

Mr. Cutts didn't answer 'im. He went down on 'is knees and cut the string that tied up the mouth o' the sack, and then 'e started back as if 'e'd been shot, and 'is eyes a'most started out of 'is 'ead.

"Wot's the matter?" ses the squire.

Mr. Cutts couldn't speak; he could only stutter and point at the sack with 'is finger, and Henery Walker, as was getting curious, lifted up the other end of it and out rolled a score of as fine cabbages as you could wish to see.

I never see people so astonished afore in all my

born days, and as for Bob Pretty, 'e stood staring at them cabbages as if 'e couldn't believe 'is eyesight.

"And that's wot I've been kept 'ere all night for," he ses, at last, shaking his 'ead. "That's wot comes

" ' You ought to be more careful,' ses Bob."

o' trying to do a kindness to keepers, and 'elping of 'em in their difficult work. P'r'aps that ain't the sack arter all, Mr. Cutts. I could ha' sworn they was pheasants in the one I found, but I may be mistook,

never 'aving 'ad one in my 'ands afore. Or p'r'aps somebody was trying to 'ave a game with you, Mr. Cutts, and deceived me instead."

The keepers on'y stared at 'im.

"You ought to be more careful," ses Bob. "Very likely while you was taking all that trouble over me, and Keeper Lewis was catching 'is death o' cold, the poachers was up at the plantation taking all they wanted. And, besides, it ain't right for Squire Rockett to 'ave to pay Henery Walker five shillings for finding a lot of old cabbages. I shouldn't like it myself."

He looked out of the corner of 'is eye at the squire, as was pretending not to notice Henery Walker touching 'is cap to him, and then 'e turns to 'is wife and he ses:—

"Come along, old gal," 'e ses. "I want my breakfast bad, and arter that I shall 'ave to lose a honest day's work in bed."

DIXON'S RETURN

WILL OWEN

DIXON'S RETURN

TALKING about eddication, said the night-watchman, thoughtfully, the finest eddication you can give a lad is to send 'im to sea. School is all right up to a certain p'int, but arter that comes the sea. I've been there myself and I know wot I'm talking about. All that I am I owe to 'aving been to sea.

There's a saying that boys will be boys. That's all right till they go to sea, and then they 'ave to be men, and good men too. They get knocked about a bit, o' course, but that's all part o' the eddication, and when they get bigger they pass the eddication they've received on to other boys smaller than wot they are. Arter I'd been at sea a year I spent all my fust time ashore going round and looking for boys wot 'ad knocked me about afore I sailed, and there was only one out o' the whole lot that I wished I 'adn't found.

Most people, o' course, go to sea as boys or else not at all, but I mind one chap as was pretty near thirty years old when 'e started. It's a good many years ago now, and he was landlord of a public-'ouse as used to stand in Wapping, called the Blue Lion.

His mother, wot had 'ad the pub afore 'im, 'ad brought 'im up very quiet and genteel, and when she died 'e went and married a fine, handsome young woman who 'ad got her eye on the pub without thinking much about 'im. I got to know about it through knowing the servant that lived there. A nice, quiet gal she was, and there wasn't much went on that she didn't hear. I've known 'er to cry for hours with the ear-ache, pore gal.

Not caring much for 'er 'usband, and being spoiled by 'im into the bargain, Mrs. Dixon soon began to lead 'im a terrible life. She was always throwing his meekness and mildness up into 'is face, and arter they 'ad been married two or three years he was no more like the landlord o' that public-'ouse than I'm like a lord. Not so much. She used to get into such terrible tempers there was no doing anything with 'er, and for the sake o' peace and quietness he gave way to 'er till 'e got into the habit of it and couldn't break 'imself of it.

They 'adn't been married long afore she 'ad her cousin, Charlie Burge, come in as barman, and a month or two arter that 'is brother Bob, who 'ad been spending a lot o' time looking for work instead o' doing it, came too. They was so comfortable there that their father—a 'ouse-painter by trade—came round to see whether he couldn't paint the Blue Lion up a bit and make 'em look smart, so that they'd get

more trade. He was one o' these 'ere fust-class 'ouse-painters that can go to sleep on a ladder holding a brush in one hand and a pot o' paint in the other, and by the time he 'ad finished painting the 'ouse it was ready to be done all over agin.

I dare say that George Dixon—that was 'is name—wouldn't ha' minded so much if 'is wife 'ad only been civil, but instead o' that she used to make fun of 'im and order 'im about, and by-and-by the others began to try the same thing. As I said afore, Dixon was a very quiet man, and if there was ever anybody to be put outside Charlie or Bob used to do it. They tried to put me outside once, the two of 'em, but they on'y did it at last by telling me that somebody 'ad gone off and left a pot o' beer standing on the pavement. They was both of 'em fairly strong young chaps with a lot of bounce in 'em, and she used to say to her 'usband wot fine young fellers they was, and wot a pity it was he wasn't like 'em.

Talk like this used to upset George Dixon awful. Having been brought up careful by 'is mother, and keeping a very quiet, respectable 'ouse—I used it myself—he cert'nly was soft, and I remember 'im telling me once that he didn't believe in fighting, and that instead of hitting people you ought to try and persuade them. He was uncommon fond of 'is wife, but at last one day, arter she 'ad made a laughing-stock of 'im in the bar, he up and spoke sharp to her.

"*Wot?*" ses Mrs. Dixon, 'ardly able to believe her ears.

"Remember who you're speaking to; that's wot I said," ses Dixon.

"'Ow dare you talk to me like that?" screams 'is wife, turning red with rage. "Wot d'ye mean by it?"

"Because you seem to forget who is master 'ere," ses Dixon, in a trembling voice.

"*Master?*" she ses, firing up. "I'll soon show you who's master. Go out o' my bar; I won't 'ave you in it. D'ye 'ear? Go out of it."

Dixon turned away and began to serve a customer.

"D'ye hear wot I say?" ses Mrs. Dixon, stamping 'er foot. "Go out o' my bar. Here, Charlie!"

"Hullo!" ses 'er cousin, who 'ad been standing looking on and grinning.

"Take the *master* and put 'im into the parlour," ses Mrs. Dixon, "and don't let 'im come out till he's begged my pardon."

"Go on," ses Charlie, brushing up 'is shirt-sleeves; "in you go. You 'ear wot she said."

He caught 'old of George Dixon, who 'ad just turned to the back o' the bar to give a customer change out of 'arf a crown, and ran 'im kicking and struggling into the parlour. George gave 'im a silly little punch in the chest, and got such a bang on the 'ead back that at fust he thought it was knocked off.

When 'e came to 'is senses agin the door leading to the bar was shut, and 'is wife's uncle, who 'ad been asleep in the easy-chair, was finding fault with 'im for waking 'im up.

" ' Go and sleep somewhere else, then,' ses Dixon."

"Why can't you be quiet and peaceable?" he ses, shaking his 'ead at him. "I've been 'ard at work all the morning thinking wot colour to paint the back-door, and this is the second time I've been woke up since dinner. You're old enough to know better."

"Go and sleep somewhere else, then," ses Dixon. "I don't want you 'ere at all, or your boys neither. Go and give somebody else a treat; I've 'ad enough of the whole pack of you."

He sat down and put 'is feet in the fender, and old Burge, as soon as he 'ad got 'is senses back, went into the bar and complained to 'is niece, and she came into the parlour like a thunderstorm.

"You'll beg my uncle's pardon as well as mine afore you come out o' that room," she said to her 'usband; "mind that."

George Dixon didn't say a word; the shame of it was a'most more than 'e could stand. Then 'e got up to go out o' the parlour and Charlie pushed 'im back agin. Three times he tried, and then 'e stood up and looked at 'is wife.

"I've been a good 'usband to you," he ses; "but there's no satisfying you. You ought to ha' married somebody that would ha' knocked you about, and then you'd ha' been happy. I'm too fond of a quiet life to suit you."

"Are you going to beg my pardon and my uncle's pardon?" ses 'is wife, stamping 'er foot.

"No," ses Dixon; "I am not. I'm surprised at you asking it."

"Well, you don't come out o' this room till you do," ses 'is wife.

"That won't hurt me," ses Dixon. "I couldn't

look anybody in the face arter being pushed out o' my own bar."

They kept 'im there all the rest o' the day, and, as 'e was still obstinate when bedtime came, Mrs. Dixon, who wasn't to be beat, brought down some bedclothes and 'ad a bed made up for 'im on the sofa. Some men would ha' 'ad the police in for less than that, but George Dixon 'ad got a great deal o' pride and 'e couldn't bear the shame of it. Instead o' that 'e acted like a fourteen-year-old boy and ran away to sea.

They found 'im gone when they came down in the morning, and the side-door on the latch. He 'ad left a letter for 'is wife on the table, telling 'er wot he 'ad done. Short and sweet it was, and wound up with telling 'er to be careful that her uncle and cousins didn't eat 'er out of house and 'ome.

She got another letter two days arterward, saying that he 'ad shipped as ordinary seaman on an American barque called the *Seabird*, bound for California, and that 'e expected to be away a year, or thereabouts.

"It'll do 'im good," ses old Burge, when Mrs. Dixon read the letter to 'em. "It's a 'ard life is the sea, and he'll appreciate his 'ome when 'e comes back to it agin. He don't know when 'e's well off. It's as comfortable a 'ome as a man could wish to 'ave."

It was surprising wot a little difference George

Dixon's Return

Dixon's being away made to the Blue Lion. Nobody seemed to miss 'im much, and things went on just the same as afore he went. Mrs. Dixon was all right with most people, and 'er relations 'ad a very good time of it; old Burge began to put on flesh at such a rate that the sight of a ladder made 'im ill a'most, and Charlie and Bob went about as if the place belonged to 'em.

They 'eard nothing for eight months, and then a letter came for Mrs. Dixon from her 'usband in which he said that 'e had left the *Seabird* after 'aving had a time which made 'im shiver to think of. He said that the men was the roughest of the rough and the officers was worse, and that he 'ad hardly 'ad a day without a blow from one or the other since he'd been aboard. He'd been knocked down with a handspike by the second mate, and had 'ad a week in his bunk with a kick given 'im by the boatswain. He said 'e was now on the *Rochester Castle*, bound for Sydney, and he 'oped for better times.

That was all they 'eard for some months, and then they got another letter saying that the men on the *Rochester Castle* was, if anything, worse than those on the *Seabird*, and that he'd begun to think that running away to sea was diff'rent to wot he'd expected, and that he supposed 'e'd done it too late in life. He sent 'is love to 'is wife and asked 'er as a favour to send Uncle Burge and 'is boys away, as 'e didn't want

to find them there when 'e came home, because they was the cause of all his sufferings.

"He don't know 'is best friends," ses old Burge. "'E's got a nasty sperrit I don't like to see."

"I'll 'ave a word with 'im when 'e does come home," ses Bob. "I s'pose he thinks 'imself safe writing letters thousands o' miles away."

The last letter they 'ad came from Auckland, and said that he 'ad shipped on the *Monarch*, bound for the Albert Docks, and he 'oped soon to be at 'ome and managing the Blue Lion, same as in the old happy days afore he was fool enough to go to sea.

That was the very last letter, and some time arterward the *Monarch* was in the missing list, and by-and-by it became known that she 'ad gone down with all hands not long arter leaving New Zealand. The only difference it made at the Blue Lion was that Mrs. Dixon 'ad two of 'er dresses dyed black, and the others wore black neckties for a fortnight and spoke of Dixon as pore George, and said it was a funny world, but they supposed everything was for the best.

It must ha' been pretty near four years since George Dixon 'ad run off to sea when Charlie, who was sitting in the bar one arternoon reading the paper, things being dull, saw a man's head peep through the door for a minute and then disappear. A'most di-

reckly arterward it looked in at another door and then disappeared agin. When it looked in at the third door Charlie 'ad put down 'is paper and was ready for it.

"Who are you looking for?" he ses, rather sharp. "Wot d'ye want? Are you 'aving a game of peep-bo, or wot?"

The man coughed and smiled, and then 'e pushed the door open gently and came in, and stood there fingering 'is beard as though 'e didn't know wot to say.

"I've come back, Charlie," he ses at last.

"Wot, *George!*" ses Charlie, starting. "Why, I didn't know you in that beard. We all thought you was dead, years ago."

"I was pretty nearly, Charlie," ses Dixon, shaking his 'ead. "Ah! I've 'ad a terrible time since I left 'ome."

"You don't seem to ha' made your fortune," ses Charlie, looking down at 'is clothes. "I'd ha' been ashamed to come 'ome like that if it 'ad been me."

"I'm wore out," ses Dixon, leaning agin the bar. "I've got no pride left; it's all been knocked out of me. How's Julia?"

"She's all right," ses Charlie. "Here, Ju——"

"*H'sh!*" ses Dixon, reaching over the bar and laying his 'and on his arm. "Don't let 'er know too sudden; break it to 'er gently."

"Fiddlesticks!" ses Charlie, throwing his 'and off and calling, "Here, *Julia!* He's come back."

Mrs. Dixon came running downstairs and into the bar. "Good gracious!" she ses, staring at her 'usband. "Whoever'd ha' thought o' seeing you agin? Where 'ave you sprung from?"

"Ain't you glad to see me, Julia?" ses George Dixon.

"Yes, I s'pose so; if you've come back to behave yourself," ses Mrs. Dixon. "What 'ave you got to say for yourself for running away and then writing them letters, telling me to get rid of my relations?"

"That's a long time ago, Julia," ses Dixon, raising the flap in the counter and going into the bar. "I've gone through a great deal o' suffering since then. I've been knocked about till I 'adn't got any feeling left in me; I've been shipwrecked, and I've 'ad to fight for my life with savages."

"Nobody asked you to run away," ses his wife, edging away as he went to put his arm round 'er waist. "You'd better go upstairs and put on some decent clothes."

Dixon looked at 'er for a moment and then he 'ung his 'ead.

"I've been thinking o' you and of seeing you agin every day since I went away, Julia," he ses. "You'd be the same to me if you was dressed in rags."

He went upstairs without another word, and old

Burge, who was coming down, came down five of 'em at once owing to Dixon speaking to 'im afore he knew who 'e was. The old man was still grumbling

"You'd better go upstairs and put on some decent clothes."

when Dixon came down agin, and said he believed he'd done it a-purpose.

"You run away from a good 'ome," he ses, "and

the best wife in Wapping, and you come back and frighten people 'arf out o' their lives. I never see such a feller in all my born days."

"I was so glad to get 'ome agin I didn't think," ses Dixon. "I hope you're not 'urt."

He started telling them all about his 'ardships while they were at tea, but none of 'em seemed to care much about hearing 'em. Bob said that the sea was all right for men, and that other people were sure not to like it.

"And you brought it all on yourself," ses Charlie. "You've only got yourself to thank for it. I 'ad thought o' picking a bone with you over those letters you wrote."

"Let's 'ope 'e's come back more sensible than wot 'e was when 'e went away," ses old Burge, with 'is mouth full o' toast.

By the time he'd been back a couple o' days George Dixon could see that 'is going away 'adn't done any good at all. Nobody seemed to take any notice of 'im or wot he said, and at last, arter a word or two with Charlie about the rough way he spoke to some o' the customers, Charlie came in to Mrs. Dixon and said that he was at 'is old tricks of interfering, and he would not 'ave it.

"Well, he'd better keep out o' the bar altogether," ses Mrs. Dixon. "There's no need for 'im to go there; we managed all right while 'e was away."

"Do you mean I'm not to go into my own bar?" ses Dixon, stammering.

"Yes, I do," ses Mrs. Dixon. "You kept out of it for four years to please yourself, and now you can keep out of it to please me."

"I've put you out o' the bar before," ses Charlie, "and if you come messing about with me any more I'll do it agin. So now you know."

He walked back into the bar whistling, and George Dixon, arter sitting still for a long time thinking, got up and went into the bar, and he'd 'ardly got his foot inside afore Charlie caught 'old of 'im by the shoulder and shoved 'im back into the parlour agin.

"I told you wot it would be," ses Mrs. Dixon, looking up from 'er sewing. "You've only got your interfering ways to thank for it."

"This is a fine state of affairs in my own 'ouse," ses Dixon, 'ardly able to speak. "You've got no proper feeling for your husband, Julia, else you wouldn't allow it. Why, I was happier at sea than wot I am 'ere."

"Well, you'd better go back to it if you're so fond of it," ses 'is wife.

"I think I 'ad," ses Dixon. "If I can't be master in my own 'ouse I'm better at sea, hard as it is. You must choose between us, Julia—me or your relations. I won't sleep under the same roof as them for another night. Am I to go?"

"Please yourself," ses 'is wife. "I don't mind your staying 'ere so long as you behave yourself, but the others won't go; you can make your mind easy on that."

"I'll go and look for another ship, then," ses Dixon, taking up 'is cap. "I'm not wanted here. P'r'aps you wouldn't mind 'aving some clothes packed into a chest for me so as I can go away decent."

He looked round at 'is wife, as though 'e expected she'd ask 'im not to go, but she took no notice, and he opened the door softly and went out, while old Burge, who 'ad come into the room and 'eard what he was saying, trotted off upstairs to pack 'is chest for 'im.

In two hours 'e was back agin and more cheerful than he 'ad been since he 'ad come 'ome. Bob was in the bar and the others were just sitting down to tea, and a big chest, nicely corded, stood on the floor in the corner of the room.

"That's right," he ses, looking at it; "that's just wot I wanted."

"It's as full as it can be," ses old Burge. "I done it for you myself. 'Ave you got a ship?"

"I 'ave," ses Dixon. "A jolly good ship. No more hardships for me this time. I've got a berth as captain."

"*Wot?*" ses 'is wife. "Captain? You!"

"Yes," ses Dixon, smiling at her. "You can sail with me if you like."

"Thankee," ses Mrs. Dixon, "I'm quite comfortable where I am."

"Do you mean to say *you've* got a master's berth?" ses Charlie, staring at 'im.

"I do," ses Dixon; "master and owner."

Charlie coughed. "Wot's the name of the ship?" he asks, winking at the others.

"The Blue Lion," ses Dixon, in a voice that made 'em all start. "I'm shipping a new crew and I pay off the old one to-night. You first, my lad."

"Pay off," ses Charlie, leaning back in 'is chair and staring at 'im in a puzzled way. "*Blue Lion?*"

"Yes," ses Dixon, in the same loud voice. "When I came 'ome the other day I thought p'r'aps I'd let bygones be bygones, and I laid low for a bit to see whether any of you deserved it. I went to sea to get hardened—and I got hard. I've fought men that would eat you at a meal. I've 'ad more blows in a week than you've 'ad in a lifetime, you fat-faced landlubber."

He walked to the door leading to the bar, where Bob was doing 'is best to serve customers and listen at the same time, and arter locking it put the key in 'is pocket. Then 'e put his 'and in 'is pocket and slapped some money down on the table in front o' Charlie.

"There's a month's pay instead o' notice," he ses. "Now git."

"George!" screams 'is wife. "'Ow dare you? 'Ave you gone crazy?"

"I'm surprised at you," ses old Burge, who'd been looking on with 'is mouth wide open, and pinching 'imself to see whether 'e wasn't dreaming.

"I don't go for your orders," ses Charlie, getting up. "Wot d'ye mean by locking that door?"

"*Wot!*" roars Dixon. "Hang it! I mustn't lock a door without asking my barman now. Pack up and be off, you swab, afore I start on you."

Charlie gave a growl and rushed at 'im, and the next moment 'e was down on the floor with the 'ardest bang in the face that he'd ever 'ad in 'is life. Mrs. Dixon screamed and ran into the kitchen, follered by old Burge, who went in to tell 'er not to be frightened. Charlie got up and went for Dixon agin; but he 'ad come back as 'ard as nails and 'ad a rushing style o' fighting that took Charlie's breath away. By the time Bob 'ad left the bar to take care of itself, and run round and got in the back way, Charlie had 'ad as much as 'e wanted and was lying on the sea-chest in the corner trying to get 'is breath.

"Yes? Wot d'ye want?" ses Dixon, with a growl, as Bob came in at the door.

He was such a 'orrible figure, with the blood on 'is face and 'is beard sticking out all ways, that Bob,

instead of doing wot he 'ad come round for, stood in the doorway staring at 'im without a word.

"Charlie had 'ad as much as 'e wanted and was lying on the sea-chest."

"I'm paying off," ses Dixon. "'Ave *you* got anything to say agin it?"

"No," ses Bob, drawing back.

"You and Charlie'll go now," ses Dixon, taking

out some money. "The old man can stay on for a month to give 'im time to look round. Don't look at me that way, else I'll knock your 'ead off."

"The way she answered her 'usband was a pleasure to every married man in the bar."

He started counting out Bob's money just as old Burge and Mrs. Dixon, hearing all quiet, came in out of the kitchen.

"Don't you be alarmed on my account, my dear,"

he ses, turning to 'is wife; "it's child's play to wot I've been used to. I'll just see these two mistaken young fellers off the premises, and then we'll 'ave a cup o' tea while the old man minds the bar."

Mrs. Dixon tried to speak, but 'er temper was too much for 'er. She looked from her 'usband to Charlie and Bob and then back at 'im agin and caught 'er breath.

"That's right," ses Dixon, nodding his 'ead at her. "I'm master and owner of the *Blue Lion* and you're first mate. When I'm speaking you keep quiet; that's dis-sipline."

I was in that bar about three months arterward, and I never saw such a change in any woman as there was in Mrs. Dixon. Of all the nice-mannered, soft-spoken landladies I've ever seen, she was the best, and on'y to 'ear the way she answered her 'usband when he spoke to 'er was a pleasure to every married man in the bar.

A SPIRIT OF AVARICE

WILL OWEN

A SPIRIT OF AVARICE

MR. JOHN BLOWS stood listening to the foreman with an air of lofty disdain. He was a free-born Englishman, and yet he had been summarily paid off at eleven o'clock in the morning and told that his valuable services would no longer be required. More than that, the foreman had passed certain strictures upon his features which, however true they might be, were quite irrelevant to the fact that Mr. Blows had been discovered slumbering in a shed when he should have been laying bricks.

"Take your ugly face off these 'ere works," said the foreman; "take it 'ome and bury it in the back-yard. Anybody'll be glad to lend you a spade."

Mr. Blows, in a somewhat fluent reply, reflected severely on the foreman's immediate ancestors, and the strange lack of good-feeling and public spirit they had exhibited by allowing him to grow up.

"Take it 'ome and bury it," said the foreman again. "Not under any plants you've got a liking for."

"I suppose," said Mr. Blows, still referring to his foe's parents, and now endeavouring to make excuses

for them—"I s'pose they was so pleased, and so surprised when they found that you *was* a 'uman being, that they didn't mind anything else."

He walked off with his head in the air, and the other men, who had partially suspended work to listen, resumed their labours. A modest pint at the Rising Sun revived his drooping spirits, and he walked home thinking of several things which he might have said to the foreman if he had only thought of them in time.

He paused at the open door of his house and, looking in, sniffed at the smell of mottled soap and dirty water which pervaded it. The stairs were wet, and a pail stood in the narrow passage. From the kitchen came the sounds of crying children and a scolding mother. Master Joseph Henry Blows, aged three, was "holding his breath," and the family were all aghast at the length of his performance. He recovered it as his father entered the room, and drowned, without distressing himself, the impotent efforts of the others. Mrs. Blows turned upon her husband a look of hot inquiry.

"I've got the chuck," he said, surlily.

"What, again?" said the unfortunate woman.

"Yes, again," repeated her husband.

Mrs. Blows turned away, and dropping into a chair threw her apron over her head and burst into discordant weeping. Two little Blows, who had

ceased their outcries, resumed them again from sheer sympathy.

"Stop it," yelled the indignant Mr. Blows; "stop it at once; d'ye hear?"

"I wish I'd never seen you," sobbed his wife from behind her apron. "Of all the lazy, idle, drunken, good-for-nothing——"

"Go on," said Mr. Blows, grimly.

"You're more trouble than you're worth," declared Mrs. Blows. "Look at your father, my dears," she continued, taking the apron away from her face; "take a good look at him, and mind you don't grow up like it."

Mr. Blows met the combined gaze of his innocent offspring with a dark scowl, and then fell to moodily walking up and down the passage until he fell over the pail. At that his mood changed, and, turning fiercely, he kicked that useful article up and down the passage until he was tired.

"I've 'ad enough of it," he muttered. He stopped at the kitchen-door and, putting his hand in his pocket, threw a handful of change on to the floor and swung out of the house.

Another pint of beer confirmed him in his resolution. He would go far away and make a fresh start in the world. The morning was bright and the air fresh, and a pleasant sense of freedom and adventure possessed his soul as he walked. At a swinging pace

he soon left Gravelton behind him, and, coming to the river, sat down to smoke a final pipe before turning his back forever on a town which had treated him so badly.

The river murmured agreeably and the rushes stirred softly in the breeze; Mr. Blows, who could fall asleep on an upturned pail, succumbed to the influence at once; the pipe dropped from his mouth and he snored peacefully.

He was awakened by a choking scream, and, starting up hastily, looked about for the cause. Then in the water he saw the little white face of Billy Clements, and wading in up to his middle he reached out and, catching the child by the hair, drew him to the bank and set him on his feet. Still screaming with terror, Billy threw up some of the water he had swallowed, and without turning his head made off in the direction of home, calling piteously upon his mother.

Mr. Blows, shivering on the bank, watched him out of sight, and, missing his cap, was just in time to see that friend of several seasons slowly sinking in the middle of the river. He squeezed the water from his trousers and, crossing the bridge, set off across the meadows.

His self-imposed term of bachelorhood lasted just three months, at the end of which time he made up his mind to enact the part of the generous husband and

forgive his wife everything. He would not go into details, but issue one big, magnanimous pardon.

Full of these lofty ideas he set off in the direction of home again. It was a three-days' tramp, and the evening of the third day saw him but a bare two miles from home. He clambered up the bank at the side of the road and, sprawling at his ease, smoked quietly in the moonlight.

A waggon piled up with straw came jolting and creaking toward him. The driver sat dozing on the shafts, and Mr. Blows smiled pleasantly as he recognised the first face of a friend he had seen for three months. He thrust his pipe in his pocket and, rising to his feet, clambered on to the back of the waggon, and lying face downward on the straw peered down at the unconscious driver below.

"I'll give old Joe a surprise," he said to himself. "He'll be the first to welcome me back."

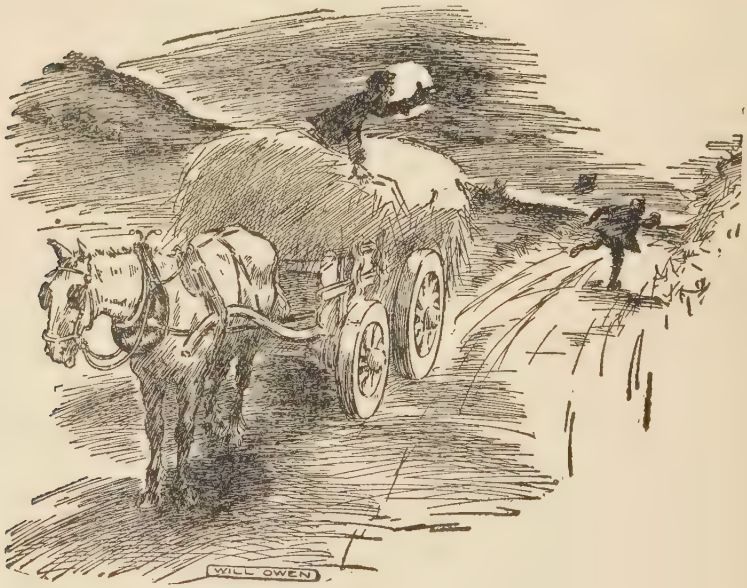
"Joe," he said, softly. "'Ow goes it, old pal?"

Mr. Joe Carter, still dozing, opened his eyes at the sound of his name and looked round; then, coming to the conclusion that he had been dreaming, closed them again.

"I'm a-looking at you, Joe," said Mr. Blows, waggishly. "I can see you."

Mr. Carter looked up sharply and, catching sight of the grinning features of Mr. Blows protruding over the edge of the straw, threw up his arms with a

piercing shriek and fell off the shafts on to the road. The astounded Mr. Blows, raising himself on his hands, saw him pick himself up and, giving vent to a series of fearsome yelps, run clumsily back along the road.



" 'Joe!' shouted Mr. Blows. 'J-O-O-OE!' "

"Joe!" shouted Mr. Blows. "J-o-o-oe!"

Mr. Carter put his hands to his ears and ran on blindly, while his friend, sitting on the top of the straw, regarded his proceedings with mixed feelings of surprise and indignation.

"It can't be that tanner 'e owes me," he mused, "and yet I don't know what else it can be. I never see a man so jumpy."

He continued to speculate while the old horse, undisturbed by the driver's absence, placidly continued its journey. A mile farther, however, he got down to take the short cut by the fields.

"If Joe can't look after his 'orse and cart," he said, primly, as he watched it along the road, "it's not my business."

The footpath was not much used at that time of night, and he only met one man. They were in the shadow of the trees which fringed the new cemetery as they passed, and both peered. The stranger was satisfied first and, to Mr. Blows's growing indignation, first gave a leap backward which would not have disgraced an acrobat, and then made off across the field with hideous outcries.

"If I get 'old of some of you," said the offended Mr. Blows, "I'll give you something to holler for."

He pursued his way grumbling, and insensibly slackened his pace as he drew near home. A remnant of conscience which had stuck to him without encouragement for thirty-five years persisted in suggesting that he had behaved badly. It also made a few ill-bred inquiries as to how his wife and children had subsisted for the last three months. He stood out-

side the house for a short space, and then, opening the door softly, walked in.

The kitchen-door stood open, and his wife in a black dress sat sewing by the light of a smoky lamp. She looked up as she heard his footsteps, and then, without a word, slid from the chair full length to the floor.

"Go on," said Mr. Blows, bitterly; "keep it up. Don't mind me."

Mrs. Blows paid no heed; her face was white and her eyes were closed. Her husband, with a dawning perception of the state of affairs, drew a mug of water from the tap and flung it over her. She opened her eyes and gave a faint scream, and then, scrambling to her feet, tottered toward him and sobbed on his breast.

"There, there," said Mr. Blows. "Don't take on; I forgive you."

"Oh, John," said his wife, sobbing convulsively, "I thought you was dead. I thought you was dead. It's only a fortnight ago since we buried you!"

"*Buried me?*" said the startled Mr. Blows. "*Buried me?*"

"I shall wake up and find I'm dreaming," wailed Mrs. Blows; "I know I shall. I'm always dreaming that you're not dead. Night before last I dreamt that you was alive, and I woke up sobbing as if my 'art would break."

"Sobbing?" said Mr. Blows, with a scowl.

"For joy, John," explained his wife.

Mr. Blows was about to ask for a further explanation of the mystery when he stopped, and regarded with much interest a fair-sized cask which stood in one corner.

"A cask o' beer," he said, staring, as he took a glass from the dresser and crossed over to it. "You don't seem to 'ave taken much 'arm during my—my going after work."

"We 'ad it for the funeral, John," said his wife; "leastways, we 'ad two; this is the second."

Mr. Blows, who had filled the glass, set it down on the table untasted; things seemed a trifle uncanny.

"Go on," said Mrs. Blows; "you've got more right to it than anybody else. Fancy 'aving you here drinking up the beer for your own funeral."

"I don't understand what you're a-driving at," retorted Mr. Blows, drinking somewhat gingerly from the glass. "'Ow could there be a funeral without me?"

"It's all a mistake," said the overjoyed Mrs. Blows; "we must have buried somebody else. But such a funeral, John; you would ha' been proud if you could ha' seen it. All Gravelton followed, nearly. There was the boys' drum and fife band, and the Ancient Order of Camels, what you used to belong to, turned out with their brass band and banners

—all the people marching four abreast and sometimes five."

Mr. Blows's face softened; he had no idea that he had established himself so firmly in the affections of his fellow-townsmen.

"Four mourning carriages," continued his wife, "and the—the hearse, all covered in flowers so that you couldn't see it 'ardly. One wreath cost two pounds."

Mr. Blows endeavoured to conceal his gratification beneath a mask of surliness. "Waste o' money," he growled, and stooping to the cask drew himself another glass of beer.

"Some o' the gentry sent their carriages to follow," said Mrs. Blows, sitting down and clasping her hands in her lap.

"I know one or two that 'ad a liking for me," said Mr. Blows, almost blushing.

"And to think that it's all a mistake," continued his wife. "But I thought it was you; it was dressed like you, and your cap was found near it."

"H'm," said Mr. Blows; "a pretty mess you've been and made of it. Here's people been giving two pounds for wreaths and turning up with brass bands and banners because they thought it was *me,* and it's all been wasted."

"It wasn't my fault," said his wife. "Little Billy Clements came running 'ome the day you went away

and said 'e'd fallen in the water, and you'd gone in and pulled 'im out. He said 'e thought you was drownded, and when you didn't come 'ome I naturally thought so too. What else could I think?"

" 'They dragged the river,' resumed his wife, 'and found the cap.' "

Mr. Blows coughed, and holding his glass up to the light regarded it with a preoccupied air.

"They dragged the river," resumed his wife, "and found the cap, but they didn't find the body till nine

weeks afterward. There was a inquest at the Peal o' Bells, and I identified you, and all that grand funeral was because they thought you'd lost your life saving little Billy. They said you was a hero."

"You've made a nice mess of it," repeated Mr. Blows.

"The rector preached the sermon," continued his wife; "a beautiful sermon it was, too. I wish you'd been there to hear it; I should 'ave enjoyed it ever so much better. He said that nobody was more surprised than what 'e was at your doing such a thing, and that it only showed 'ow little we knowed our fellow-creatures. He said that it proved there was good in all of us if we only gave it a chance to come out."

Mr. Blows eyed her suspiciously, but she sat thinking and staring at the floor.

"I s'pose we shall have to give the money back now," she said, at last.

"Money!" said the other; "what money?"

"Money that was collected for us," replied his wife. "One 'undered and eighty-three pounds seven shillings and fourpence."

Mr. Blows took a long breath. "'Ow much?" he said, faintly; "say it agin."

His wife obeyed.

"Show it to me," said the other, in trembling tones; "let's 'ave a look at it. Let's 'old some of it."

"I can't," was the reply; "there's a committee of the Camels took charge of it, and they pay my rent and allow me ten shillings a week. Now I s'pose it'll have to be given back?"

"Don't you talk nonsense," said Mr. Blows, violently. "You go to them interfering Camels and say you want your money—all of it. Say you're going to Australia. Say it was my last dying wish."

Mrs. Blows puckered her brow.

"I'll keep quiet upstairs till you've got it," continued her husband, rapidly. "There was only two men saw me, and I can see now that they thought I was my own ghost. Send the kids off to your mother for a few days."

His wife sent them off next morning, and a little later was able to tell him that his surmise as to his friends' mistake was correct. All Gravelton was thrilled by the news that the spiritual part of Mr. John Blows was walking the earth, and much exercised as to his reasons for so doing.

"Seemed such a monkey trick for 'im to do," complained Mr. Carter, to the listening circle at the Peal o' Bells. "'I'm a-looking at you, Joe,' he ses, and he waggled his 'ead as if it was made of india-rubber."

"He'd got something on 'is mind what he wanted to tell you," said a listener, severely; "you ought to 'ave stopped, Joe, and asked 'im what it was."

"I think I see myself," said the shivering Mr. Carter. "I think I see myself."

"Then he wouldn't 'ave troubled you any more," said the other.

Mr. Carter turned pale and eyed him fixedly.

"P'r'aps it was only a death-warning," said another man.

"What d'ye mean, '*only* a death-warning'?" demanded the unfortunate Mr. Carter; "you don't know what you're talking about."

"I 'ad an uncle o' mine see a ghost once," said a third man, anxious to relieve the tension.

"And what 'appened?" inquired the first speaker.

"I'll tell you after Joe's gone," said the other, with rare consideration.

Mr. Carter called for some more beer and told the barmaid to put a little gin in it. In a pitiable state of "nerves" he sat at the extreme end of a bench, and felt that he was an object of unwholesome interest to his acquaintances. The finishing touch was put to his discomfiture when a well-meaning friend in a vague and disjointed way advised him to give up drink, swearing, and any other bad habits which he might have contracted.

The committee of the Ancient Order of Camels took the news calmly, and classed it with pink rats and other abnormalities. In reply to Mrs. Blows's request for the capital sum, they expressed astonish-

ment that she could be willing to tear herself away from the hero's grave, and spoke of the pain which such an act on her part would cause him in the event of his being conscious of it. In order to show that

"In a pitiable state of 'nerves' he sat at the extreme end of a bench."

they were reasonable men, they allowed her an extra shilling that week.

The hero threw the dole on the bedroom floor, and in a speech bristling with personalities, consigned the committee to perdition. The confinement was begin-

ning to tell upon him, and two nights afterward, just before midnight, he slipped out for a breath of fresh air.

It was a clear night, and all Gravelton with one exception, appeared to have gone to bed. The exception was Police-constable Collins, and he, after tracking the skulking figure of Mr. Blows and finally bringing it to bay in a doorway, kept his for a fortnight. As a sensible man, Mr. Blows took no credit to himself for the circumstance, but a natural feeling of satisfaction at the discomfiture of a member of a force for which he had long entertained a strong objection could not be denied.

Gravelton debated this new appearance with bated breath, and even the purblind committee of the Camels had to alter their views. They no longer denied the supernatural nature of the manifestations, but, with a strange misunderstanding of Mr. Blows's desires, attributed his restlessness to dissatisfaction with the projected tombstone, and, having plenty of funds, amended their order for a plain stone at ten guineas to one in pink marble at twenty-five.

"That there committee," said Mr. Blows to his wife, in a trembling voice, as he heard of the alteration—"that there committee seem to think that they can play about with my money as they like. You go and tell 'em you won't 'ave it. And say you've given up the idea of going to Australia and you want the

money to open a shop with. We'll take a little pub somewhere."

Mrs. Blows went, and returned in tears, and for two entire days her husband, a prey to gloom, sat trying to evolve fresh and original ideas for the possession of the money. On the evening of the second day he became low-spirited, and going down to the kitchen took a glass from the dresser and sat down by the beer-cask.

Almost insensibly he began to take a brighter view of things. It was Saturday night and his wife was out. He shook his head indulgently as he thought of her, and began to realise how foolish he had been to entrust such a delicate mission to a woman. The Ancient Order of Camels wanted a man to talk to them—a man who knew the world and could assail them with unanswerable arguments. Having applied every known test to make sure that the cask was empty, he took his cap from a nail and sallied out into the street.

Old Mrs. Martin, a neighbour, saw him first, and announced the fact with a scream that brought a dozen people round her. Bereft of speech, she mouthed dumbly at Mr. Blows.

"I ain't touch—touched her," said that gentleman, earnestly. "I ain't—been near 'er."

The crowd regarded him wild-eyed. Fresh members came running up, and pushing for a front place

fell back hastily on the main body and watched breathlessly. Mr. Blows, disquieted by their silence, renewed his protestations.

"I was coming 'long——"

He broke off suddenly and, turning round, gazed with some heat at a gentleman who was endeavouring to ascertain whether an umbrella would pass through him. The investigator backed hastily into the crowd again, and a faint murmur of surprise arose as the indignant Mr. Blows rubbed the place.

"He's alive, I tell you," said a voice. "What cheer, Jack!"

"Ullo, Bill," said Mr. Blows, genially.

Bill came forward cautiously, and, first shaking hands, satisfied himself by various little taps and prods that his friend was really alive.

"It's all right," he shouted; "come and feel."

At least fifty hands accepted the invitation, and, ignoring the threats and entreaties of Mr. Blows, who was a highly ticklish subject, wandered briskly over his anatomy. He broke free at last and, supported by Bill and a friend, set off for the Peal o' Bells.

By the time he arrived there his following had swollen to immense proportions. Windows were thrown up, and people standing on their doorsteps shouted inquiries. Congratulations met him on all sides, and the joy of Mr. Joseph Carter was so great that Mr. Blows was quite affected.

A Spirit of Avarice

In high feather at the attention he was receiving, Mr. Blows pushed his way through the idlers at the door and ascended the short flight of stairs which led to the room where the members of the Ancient Order of Camels were holding their lodge. The crowd swarmed up after him.

The door was locked, but in response to his knocking it opened a couple of inches, and a gruff voice demanded his business. Then, before he could give it, the doorkeeper reeled back into the room, and Mr. Blows with a large following pushed his way in.

The president and his officers, who were sitting in state behind a long table at the end of the room, started to their feet with mingled cries of indignation and dismay at the intrusion. Mr. Blows, conscious of the strength of his position, walked up to them.

"*Mr. Blows!*" gasped the president.

"Ah, you didn't expec' see me," said Mr. Blows, with a scornful laugh. "They're trying do me, do me out o' my lill bit o' money, Bill."

"But you ain't got no money," said his bewildered friend.

Mr. Blows turned and eyed him haughtily; then he confronted the staring president again.

"I've come for—my money," he said, impressively —"one 'undereighty pounds."

"But look 'ere," said the scandalised Bill, tugging at his sleeve; "you ain't dead, Jack."

"You don't understan'," said Mr. Blows, impatiently. "They know wharri mean; one 'undereighty pounds. They want to buy me a tombstone, an' I don't want it. I want the money. Here, stop it! *D'ye hear?*" The words were wrung from him by

"Mr. Blows, conscious of the strength of his position, walked up to them."

the action of the president, who, after eyeing him doubtfully during his remarks, suddenly prodded him with the butt-end of one of the property spears which leaned against his chair. The solidity of Mr. Blows was unmistakable, and with a sudden resumption of

dignity the official seated himself and called for silence.

"I'm sorry to say there's been a bit of a mistake made," he said, slowly, "but I'm glad to say that Mr. Blows has come back to support his wife and family with the sweat of his own brow. Only a pound or two of the money so kindly subscribed has been spent, and the remainder will be handed back to the subscribers."

"Here," said the incensed Mr. Blows, "listen me."

"Take him away," said the president, with great dignity. "Clear the room. Strangers outside."

Two of the members approached Mr. Blows and, placing their hands on his shoulders, requested him to withdraw. He went at last, the centre of a dozen panting men, and becoming wedged on the narrow staircase, spoke fluently on such widely differing subjects as the rights of man and the shape of the president's nose.

He finished his remarks in the street, but, becoming aware at last of a strange lack of sympathy on the part of his audience, he shook off the arm of the faithful Mr. Carter and stalked moodily home.

THE THIRD STRING

WILL OWEN

THE THIRD STRING

LOVE? said the night-watchman, as he watched in an abstracted fashion the efforts of a skipper to reach a brother skipper on a passing barge with a boathook. Don't talk to me about love, because I've suffered enough through it. There ought to be teetotalers for love the same as wot there is for drink, and they ought to wear a piece o' ribbon to show it, the same as the teetotalers do; but not an attractive piece o' ribbon, mind you. I've seen as much mischief caused by love as by drink, and the funny thing is, one often leads to the other. Love, arter it is over, often leads to drink, and drink often leads to love and to a man committing himself for life afore it is over.

Sailormen give way to it most; they see so little o' wimmen that they naturally 'ave a high opinion of 'em. Wait till they become night-watchmen and, having to be at 'ome all day, see the other side of 'em. If people on'y started life as night-watchmen there wouldn't be one 'arf the falling in love that there is now.

I remember one chap, as nice a fellow as you could

wish to meet, too. He always carried his sweetheart's photograph about with 'im, and it was the on'y thing that cheered 'im up during the fourteen years he was cast away on a deserted island. He was picked up at last and taken 'ome, and there she was still single and waiting for 'im; and arter spending fourteen years on a deserted island he got another ten in quod for shooting 'er because she 'ad altered so much in 'er looks.

Then there was Ginger Dick, a red-'aired man I've spoken about before. He went and fell in love one time when he was lodging in Wapping 'ere with old Sam Small and Peter Russet, and a nice mess 'e made of it.

They was just back from a v'y'ge, and they 'adn't been ashore a week afore both of 'em noticed a change for the worse in Ginger. He turned quiet and peaceful and lost 'is taste for beer. He used to play with 'is food instead of eating it, and in place of going out of an evening with Sam and Peter took to going off by 'imself.

"It's love," ses Peter Russet, shaking his 'ead, "and he'll be worse afore he's better."

"Who's the gal?" ses old Sam.

Peter didn't know, but when they came 'ome that night 'e asked. Ginger, who was sitting up in bed with a far-off look in 'is eyes, cuddling 'is knees, went on staring but didn't answer.

"Who is it making a fool of you this time, Ginger?" ses old Sam.

"You mind your bisness and I'll mind mine," ses Ginger, suddenly waking up and looking very fierce.

"No offence, mate," ses Sam, winking at Peter. "I on'y asked in case I might be able to do you a good turn."

"Well, you can do that by not letting her know you're a pal o' mine," ses Ginger, very nasty.

Old Sam didn't understand at fust, and when Peter explained to 'im he wanted to hit 'im for trying to twist Ginger's words about.

"She don't like fat old men," ses Ginger.

"Ho!" ses old Sam, who couldn't think of anything else to say. "Ho! don't she? Ho! Ho! indeed!"

He undressed 'imself and got into the bed he shared with Peter, and kept 'im awake for hours by telling 'im in a loud voice about all the gals he'd made love to in his life, and partikler about one gal that always fainted dead away whenever she saw either a red-'aired man or a monkey.

Peter Russet found out all about it next day, and told Sam that it was a barmaid with black 'air and eyes at the Jolly Pilots, and that she wouldn't 'ave anything to say to Ginger.

He spoke to Ginger about it agin when they were going to bed that night, and to 'is surprise found that

he was quite civil. When 'e said that he would do anything he could for 'im, Ginger was quite affected.

"I can't eat or drink," he ses, in a miserable voice; "I lay awake all last night thinking of her. She's so diff'rent to other gals; she's got— If I start on you, Sam Small, you'll know it. You go and make that choking noise to them as likes it."

"It's a bit o' egg-shell I got in my throat at breakfast this morning, Ginger," ses Sam. "I wonder whether she lays awake all night thinking of you?"

"I dare say she does," ses Peter Russet, giving 'im a little push.

"Keep your 'art up, Ginger," ses Sam; "I've known gals to 'ave the most ext'ordinary likings afore now."

"Don't take no notice of 'im," ses Peter, holding Ginger back. "'Ow are you getting on with her?"

Ginger groaned and sat down on 'is bed and looked at the floor, and Sam went and sat on his till it shook so that Ginger offered to step over and break 'is neck for 'im.

"I can't 'elp the bed shaking," ses Sam; "it ain't my fault. I didn't make it. If being in love is going to make you so disagreeable to your best friends, Ginger, you'd better go and live by yourself."

"I 'eard something about her to-day, Ginger," ses Peter Russet. "I met a chap I used to know at Bull's Wharf, and he told me that she used to keep com-

pany with a chap named Bill Lumm, a bit of a prize-fighter, and since she gave 'im up she won't look at anybody else."

"Was she very fond of 'im, then?" asks Ginger.

"I don't know," ses Peter; "but this chap told me that she won't walk out with anybody agin, unless it's another prize-fighter. Her pride won't let her, I s'pose."

"Well, that's all right, Ginger," ses Sam; "all you've got to do is to go and be a prize-fighter."

"If I 'ave any more o' your nonsense—" ses Ginger, starting up.

"That's right," ses Sam; "jump down anybody's throat when they're trying to do you a kindness. That's you all over, Ginger, that is. Wot's to prevent you telling 'er that you're a prize-fighter from Australia or somewhere? She won't know no better."

He got up off the bed and put his 'ands up as Ginger walked across the room to 'im, but Ginger on'y wanted to shake 'ands, and arter he 'ad done that 'e patted 'im on the back and smiled at 'im.

"I'll try it," he ses. "I'd tell any lies for 'er sake. Ah! you don't know wot love is, Sam."

"I used to," ses Sam, and then he sat down agin and began to tell 'em all the love-affairs he could remember, until at last Peter Russet got tired and said it was 'ard to believe, looking at 'im now, wot a per-

fick terror he'd been with gals, and said that the face he'd got now was a judgment on 'im. Sam shut up arter that, and got into trouble with Peter in the middle o' the night by waking 'im up to tell 'im something that he 'ad just thought of about *his* face.

The more Ginger thought o' Sam's idea the more he liked it, and the very next evening 'e took Peter Russet into the private bar o' the Jolly Pilots. He ordered port wine, which he thought seemed more 'igh-class than beer, and then Peter Russet started talking to Miss Tucker and told her that Ginger was a prize-fighter from Sydney, where he'd beat everybody that stood up to 'im.

The gal seemed to change toward Ginger all in a flash, and 'er beautiful black eyes looked at 'im so admiring that he felt quite faint. She started talking to 'im about his fights at once, and when at last 'e plucked up courage to ask 'er to go for a walk with 'im on Sunday arternoon she seemed quite delighted.

"It'll be a nice change for me," she ses, smiling. "I used to walk out with a prize-fighter once before, and since I gave 'im up I began to think I was never going to 'ave a young man agin. You can't think 'ow dull it's been."

"Must ha' been," ses Ginger.

"I s'pose you've got a taste for prize-fighters, miss," ses Peter Russet.

"No," ses Miss Tucker; "I don't think that it's

that exactly, but, you see, I couldn't 'ave anybody else. Not for their own sakes."

"Miss Tucker."

"Why not?" ses Ginger, looking puzzled.

"Why not?" ses Miss Tucker. "Why, because o' Bill. He's such a 'orrid jealous disposition. After I gave 'im up I walked out with a young fellow named Smith; fine, big, strapping chap 'e was, too, and I never saw such a change in any man as there was in 'im after Bill 'ad done with 'im. I couldn't believe it was 'im. I told Bill he ought to be ashamed of 'imself."

"Wot did 'e say?" asks Ginger.

"Don't ask me wot 'e said," ses Miss Tucker, tossing her 'ead. "Not liking to be beat, I 'ad one more try with a young fellow named Charlie Webb."

"Wot 'appened to 'im?" ses Peter Russet, arter waiting a bit for 'er to finish.

"I can't bear to talk of it," ses Miss Tucker, holding up Ginger's glass and giving the counter a wipe down. "*He* met Bill, and I saw 'im six weeks afterward just as 'e was being sent away from the 'ospital to a seaside home. Bill disappeared after that."

"Has he gone far away?" ses Ginger, trying to speak in a off-'and way.

"Oh, he's back now," ses Miss Tucker. "You'll see 'im fast enough, and, wotever you do, don't let 'im know you're a prize-fighter."

"Why not?" ses pore Ginger.

"Because o' the surprise it'll be to 'im," ses Miss Tucker. "Let 'im rush on to 'is doom. He'll get a

lesson 'e don't expect, the bully. Don't be afraid of 'urting 'im. Think o' pore Smith and Charlie Webb."

"I am thinkin' of 'em," ses Ginger, slow-like. "Is —is Bill—very quick—with his 'ands?"

"*Rather*," ses Miss Tucker; "but o' course he ain't up to your mark; he's on'y known in these parts."

She went off to serve a customer, and Ginger Dick tried to catch Peter's eye, but couldn't, and when Miss Tucker came back he said 'e must be going.

"Sunday afternoon at a quarter past three sharp, outside 'ere," she ses. "Never mind about putting on your best clothes, because Bill is sure to be hanging about. I'll take care o' that."

She reached over the bar and shook 'ands with 'im, and Ginger felt a thrill go up 'is arm which lasted 'im all the way 'ome.

He didn't know whether to turn up on Sunday or not, and if it 'adn't ha' been for Sam and Peter Russet he'd ha' most likely stayed at home. Not that 'e was a coward, being always ready for a scrap and gin'rally speaking doing well at it, but he made a few inquiries about Bill Lumm and 'e saw that 'e had about as much chance with 'im as a kitten would 'ave with a bulldog.

Sam and Peter was delighted, and they talked about it as if it was a pantermime, and old Sam said that when *he* was a young man he'd ha' fought six

Bill Lumms afore he'd ha' given a gal up. He brushed Ginger's clothes for 'im with 'is own hands on Sunday arternoon, and, when Ginger started, 'im and Peter follered some distance behind to see fair play.

The on'y person outside the Jolly Pilots when Ginger got there was a man; a strong-built chap with a thick neck, very large 'ands, and a nose which 'ad seen its best days some time afore. He looked 'ard at Ginger as 'e came up, and then stuck his 'ands in 'is trouser pockets and spat on the pavement. Ginger walked a little way past and then back agin, and just as he was thinking that 'e might venture to go off, as Miss Tucker 'adn't come, the door opened and out she came.

"I couldn't find my 'at-pins," she ses, taking Ginger's arm and smiling up into 'is face.

Before Ginger could say anything the man he 'ad noticed took his 'ands out of 'is pockets and stepped up to 'im.

"Let go o' that young lady's arm," he ses.

"Sha'n't," ses Ginger, holding it so tight that Miss Tucker nearly screamed.

"Let go 'er arm and put your 'ands up," ses the chap agin.

"Not 'ere," ses Ginger, who 'ad laid awake the night afore thinking wot to do if he met Bill Lumm. "If you wish to 'ave a spar with me, my lad, you

must 'ave it where we can't be interrupted. When I start on a man I like to make a good job of it."

" 'Let go o' that young lady's arm,' he ses."

"Good job of it!" ses the other, starting. "Do you know who I am?"

"No, I don't," ses Ginger, "and, wot's more, I don't care."

"My name," ses the chap, speaking in a slow, careful voice, "is Bill Lumm."

"Wot a 'orrid name!" ses Ginger.

"Otherwise known as the Wapping Basher," ses Bill, shoving 'is face into Ginger's and glaring at 'im.

"Ho!" ses Ginger, sniffing, "a amatoor."

"*Amatoor?*" ses Bill, shouting.

"That's wot we should call you over in Australia," ses Ginger; "*my* name is Dick Duster, likewise known as the Sydney Puncher. I've killed three men in the ring and 'ave never 'ad a defeat."

"Well, put 'em up," ses Bill, doubling up 'is fists and shaping at 'im.

"Not in the street, I tell you," ses Ginger, still clinging tight to Miss Tucker's arm. "I was fined five pounds the other day for punching a man in the street, and the magistrate said it would be 'ard labour for me next time. You find a nice, quiet spot for some arternoon, and I'll knock your 'ead off with pleasure."

"I'd sooner 'ave it knocked off now," ses Bill; "I don't like waiting for things."

"Thursday arternoon," ses Ginger, very firm; "there's one or two gentlemen want to see a bit o' my work afore backing me, and we can combine bisness with pleasure."

He walked off with Miss Tucker, leaving Bill Lumm standing on the pavement scratching his 'ead

and staring arter 'im as though 'e didn't quite know wot to make of it. Bill stood there for pretty near five minutes, and then arter asking Sam and Peter, who 'ad been standing by listening, whether they wanted anything for themselves, walked off to ask 'is pals wot they knew about the Sydney Puncher.

Ginger Dick was so quiet and satisfied about the fight that old Sam and Peter couldn't make 'im out at all. He wouldn't even practise punching at a bolster that Peter rigged up for 'im, and when 'e got a message from Bill Lumm naming a quiet place on the Lea Marshes he agreed to it as comfortable as possible.

"Well, I must say, Ginger, that I like your pluck," ses Peter Russet.

"I always 'ave said that for Ginger; 'e's got pluck," ses Sam.

Ginger coughed and tried to smile at 'em in a superior sort o' way. "I thought you'd got more sense," he ses, at last. "You don't think I'm going, do you?"

"*Wot?*" ses old Sam, in a shocked voice.

"You're never going to back out of it, Ginger?" ses Peter.

"I am," ses Ginger. "If you think I'm going to be smashed up by a prize-fighter just to show my pluck you're mistook."

"You must go, Ginger," ses old Sam, very severe.

"It's too late to back out of it now. Think of the gal. Think of 'er feelings."

"For the sake of your good name," ses Peter.

"I should never speak to you agin, Ginger," ses old Sam, pursing up 'is lips.

"Nor me neither," ses Peter Russet.

"To think of our Ginger being called a coward," ses old Sam, with a shudder, "and afore a gal, too."

"The loveliest gal in Wapping," ses Peter.

"Look 'ere," ses Ginger, "you can shut up, both of you. I'm not going, and that's the long and short of it. I don't mind an ordinary man, but I draw the line at prize-fighters."

Old Sam sat down on the edge of 'is bed and looked the picture of despair. "You must go, Ginger," he ses, "for my sake."

"Your sake?" ses Ginger, staring.

"I've got money on it," ses Sam, "so's Peter. If you don't turn up all bets'll be off."

"Good job for you, too," ses Ginger. "If I did turn up you'd lose it, to a dead certainty."

Old Sam coughed and looked at Peter, and Peter 'e coughed and looked at Sam.

"You don't understand, Ginger," said Sam, in a soft voice; "it ain't often a chap gets the chance o' making a bit o' money these 'ard times."

"So we've put all our money on Bill Lumm," ses Peter. "It's the safest and easiest way o' making

money I ever 'eard of. You see, we know you're not a prize-fighter and the others don't."

Pore Ginger looked at 'em, and then 'e called 'em all the names he could lay 'is tongue to, but, with the idea o' the money they was going make, they didn't mind a bit. They let him 'ave 'is say, and that night they brought 'ome two other sailormen wot 'ad bet agin Ginger to share their room, and, though they 'ad bet agin 'im, they was so fond of 'im that it was evident that they wasn't going to leave 'im till the fight was over.

Ginger gave up then, and at twelve o'clock next day they started off to find the place. Mr. Webson, the landlord of the Jolly Pilots, a short, fat man o' fifty, wot 'ad spoke to Ginger once or twice, went with 'em, and all the way to the station he kept saying wot a jolly spot it was for that sort o' thing. Perfickly private; nice soft green grass to be knocked down on, and larks up in the air singing away as if they'd never leave off.

They took the train to Homerton, and, being a slack time o' the day, the porters was surprised to see wot a lot o' people was travelling by it. So was Ginger. There was the landlords of 'arf the public-'ouses in Wapping, all smoking big cigars; two dock policemen in plain clothes, wot 'ad got the arternoon off—one with a raging toothache and the other with a baby wot wasn't expected to last the day out. They

was as full o' fun as kittens, and the landlord o' the Jolly Pilots pointed out to Ginger wot reasonable 'uman beings policemen was at 'art. Besides them there was quite a lot o' sailormen, even skippers and mates, nearly all of 'em smoking big cigars, too, and looking at Ginger out of the corner of one eye and at the Wapping Basher out of the corner of the other.

"Hit 'ard and hit straight," ses the landlord to Ginger in a low voice, as they got out of the train and walked up the road. "'Ow are you feeling?"

"I've got a cold coming on," ses pore Ginger, looking at the Basher, who was on in front, "and a splitting 'eadache, and a sharp pain all down my left leg. I don't think——"

"Well, it's a good job it's no worse," ses the landlord; "all you've got to do is to hit 'ard. If you win it's a 'undered pounds in my pocket, and I'll stand you a fiver of it. D'ye understand?"

They turned down some little streets, several of 'em going diff'rent ways, and arter crossing the River Lea got on to the marshes, and, as the landlord said, the place might ha' been made for it.

A little chap from Mile End was the referee, and Bill Lumm, 'aving peeled, stood looking on while Ginger took 'is things off and slowly and carefully folded 'em up. Then they stepped toward each other, Bill taking longer steps than Ginger, and

shook 'ands; immediately arter which Bill knocked Ginger head over 'eels.

"Time!" was called, and the landlord o' the Jolly Pilots, who was nursing Ginger on 'is knee, said that

"Bill Lumm, 'aving peeled, stood looking on while Ginger took 'is things off."

it was nothing at all, and that bleeding at the nose was a sign of 'ealth. But as it happened Ginger was that mad 'e didn't want any encouragement, he on'y wanted to kill Bill Lumm.

He got two or three taps in the next round which

made his 'ead ring, and then he got 'ome on the mark and follered it up by a left-'anded punch on Bill's jaw that surprised 'em both—Bill because he didn't think Ginger could hit so 'ard, and Ginger because 'e didn't think that prize-fighters 'ad any feelings.

They clinched and fell that round, and the landlord patted Ginger on the back and said that if he ever 'ad a son he 'oped he'd grow up like 'im.

Ginger was surprised at the way 'e was getting on, and so was old Sam and Peter Russet, and when Ginger knocked Bill down in the sixth round Sam went as pale as death. Ginger was getting marked all over, but he stuck to 'is man, and the two dock policemen, wot 'ad put thier money on Bill Lumm, began to talk of their dooty, and say as 'ow the fight ought to be stopped.

At the tenth round Bill couldn't see out of 'is eyes, and kept wasting 'is strength on the empty air, and once on the referee. Ginger watched 'is opportunity, and at last, with a terrific smash on the point o' Bill's jaw, knocked 'im down and then looked round for the landlord's knee.

Bill made a game try to get up when "Time!" was called, but couldn't; and the referee, who was 'olding a 'andkerchief to 'is nose, gave the fight to Ginger.

It was the proudest moment o' Ginger Dick's life. He sat there like a king, smiling 'orribly, and Sam's voice as he paid 'is losings sounded to 'im like music,

in spite o' the words the old man see fit to use. It was so 'ard to get Peter Russet's money that it a'most looked as though there was going to be another prize-fight, but 'e paid up at last and went off, arter fust telling Ginger part of wot he thought of 'im.

There was a lot o' quarrelling, but the bets was all settled at last, and the landlord o' the Jolly Pilots, who was in 'igh feather with the money he'd won, gave Ginger the five pounds he'd promised and took him 'ome in a cab.

"You done well, my lad," he ses. "No, don't smile. It looks as though your 'ead's coming off."

"I 'ope you'll tell Miss Tucker 'ow I fought," ses Ginger.

"I will, my lad," ses the landlord; "but you'd better not see 'er for some time, for both your sakes."

"I was thinking of 'aving a day or two in bed," ses Ginger.

"Best thing you can do," ses the landlord; "and mind, don't you ever fight Bill Lumm agin. Keep out of 'is way."

"Why? I beat 'im once, an' I can beat 'im agin," ses Ginger, offended.

"*Beat 'im?*" ses the landlord. He took 'is cigar out of 'is mouth as though 'e was going to speak, and then put it back agin and looked out of the window.

"Yes, beat 'im," ses Ginger. "You was there and saw it."

"He lost the fight a-purpose," ses the landlord, whispering. "Miss Tucker found out that you wasn't a prize-fighter—leastways, I did for 'er—and she told Bill that, if 'e loved 'er so much that he'd 'ave 'is sinful pride took down by letting you beat 'im, she'd think diff'rent of 'im. Why, 'e could 'ave settled you in a minute if he'd liked. He was on'y playing with you."

Ginger stared at 'im as if 'e couldn't believe 'is eyes. "Playing?" he ses, feeling 'is face very gently with the tips of his fingers.

"Yes," ses the landlord; "and if he ever hits you agin you'll know I'm speaking the truth."

Ginger sat back all of a heap and tried to think. "Is Miss Tucker going to keep company with 'im agin, then?" he ses, in a faint voice.

"No," ses the landlord; "you can make your mind easy on that point."

"Well, then, if I walk out with 'er I shall 'ave to fight Bill all over agin," ses Ginger.

The landlord turned to 'im and patted 'im on the shoulder. "Don't you take up your troubles afore they come, my lad," he ses, kindly; "and mind and keep wot I've told you dark, for all our sakes."

He put 'im down at the door of 'is lodgings and, arter shaking 'ands with 'im, gave the landlady a shilling and told 'er to get some beefsteak and put on 'is face, and went home. Ginger went straight off to

bed, and the way he carried on when the landlady fried the steak afore bringing it up showed 'ow upset he was.

"The way he carried on when the landlady fried the steak showed 'ow upset he was."

It was over a week afore he felt 'e could risk letting Miss Tucker see 'im, and then at seven o'clock one evening he felt 'e couldn't wait any longer, and arter spending an hour cleaning 'imself he started out for the Jolly Pilots.

He felt so 'appy at the idea o' seeing her agin that 'e forgot all about Bill Lumm, and it gave 'im quite a shock when 'e saw 'im standing outside the Pilots. Bill took his 'ands out of 'is pockets when he saw 'im and came toward 'im.

"It's no good to-night, mate," he ses; and to Ginger's great surprise shook 'ands with 'im.

"No good?" ses Ginger, staring.

"No," ses Bill; "he's in the little back-parlour, like a whelk in 'is shell; but we'll 'ave 'im sooner or later."

"Him? Who?" ses Ginger, more puzzled than ever.

"Who?" ses Bill; "why, Webson, the landlord. You don't mean to tell me you ain't heard about it?"

"Heard wot?" ses Ginger. "I haven't 'eard anything. I've been indoors with a bad cold all the week."

"Webson and Julia Tucker was married at eleven o'clock yesterday morning," ses Bill Lumm, in a hoarse voice. "When I think of the way I've been done, and wot I've suffered, I feel 'arf crazy. He won a 'undered pounds through me, and then got the

gal I let myself be disgraced for. I 'ad an idea some time ago that he'd got 'is eye on her."

Ginger Dick didn't answer 'im a word. He staggered back and braced 'imself up agin the wall for a bit, and arter staring at Bill Lumm in a wild way for pretty near three minutes he crawled back to 'is lodgings and went straight to bed agin.

ODD CHARGES

WILL OWEN

ODD CHARGES

SEATED at his ease in the warm tap-room of the Cauliflower, the stranger had been eating and drinking for some time, apparently unconscious of the presence of the withered ancient who, huddled up in that corner of the settle which was nearer to the fire, fidgeted restlessly with an empty mug and blew with pathetic insistence through a churchwarden pipe which had long been cold. The stranger finished his meal with a sigh of content and then, rising from his chair, crossed over to the settle and, placing his mug on the time-worn table before him, began to fill his pipe.

The old man took a spill from the table and, holding it with trembling fingers to the blaze, gave him a light. The other thanked him, and then, leaning back in his corner of the settle, watched the smoke of his pipe through half-closed eyes, and assented drowsily to the old man's remarks upon the weather.

"Bad time o' the year for going about," said the latter, "though I s'pose if you can eat and drink as much as you want it don't matter. I s'pose you mightn't be a conjurer from London, sir?"

The traveller shook his head.

"I was 'oping you might be," said the old man.

The other manifested no curiosity.

"If you 'ad been," said the old man, with a sigh, "I should ha' asked you to ha' done something useful. Gin'rally speaking, conjurers do things that are no use to anyone; wot I should like to see a conjurer do would be to make this 'ere empty mug full o' beer and this empty pipe full o' shag tobacco. That's wot I should ha' made bold to ask you to do if you'd been one."

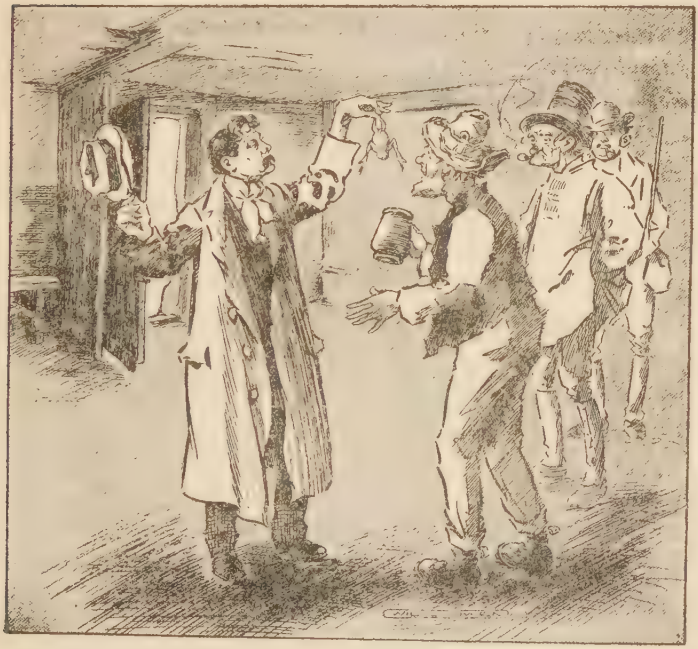
The traveller sighed, and, taking his short briar pipe from his mouth by the bowl, rapped three times upon the table with it. In a very short time a mug of ale and a paper cylinder of shag appeared on the table before the old man.

"Wot put me in mind o' your being a conjurer," said the latter, filling his pipe after a satisfying draught from the mug, "is that you're uncommon like one that come to Claybury some time back and give a performance in this very room where we're now a-sitting. So far as looks go, you might be his brother."

The traveller said that he never had a brother.

We didn't know 'e was a conjurer at fust, said the old man. He 'ad come down for Wickham Fair and, being a day or two before'and, 'e was going to different villages round about to give perform-

ances. He came into the bar 'ere and ordered a mug o' beer, and while 'e was a-drinking of it stood talking about the weather. Then 'e asked Bill Chambers



"Putting his 'and to Bill's mug, he took out a live frog."

to excuse 'im for taking the liberty, and, putting his 'and to Bill's mug, took out a live frog. Bill was a very partikler man about wot 'e drunk, and I

thought he'd ha' had a fit. He went on at Smith, the landlord, something shocking, and at last, for the sake o' peace and quietness, Smith gave 'im another pint to make up for it.

"It must ha' been asleep in the mug," he ses.

Bill said that 'e thought 'e knew who must ha' been asleep, and was just going to take a drink, when the conjurer asked 'im to excuse 'im agin. Bill put down the mug in a 'urry, and the conjurer put his 'and to the mug and took out a dead mouse. It would ha' been a 'ard thing to say which was the most upset, Bill Chambers or Smith, the landlord, and Bill, who was in a terrible state, asked why it was everything seemed to get into *his* mug.

"P'r'aps you're fond o' dumb animals, sir," ses the conjurer. "Do you 'appen to notice your coat-pocket is all of a wriggle?"

He put his 'and to Bill's pocket and took out a little green snake; then he put his 'and to Bill's trouser-pocket and took out a frog, while pore Bill's eyes looked as if they was coming out o' their sockets.

"Keep still," ses the conjurer; "there's a lot more to come yet."

Bill Chambers gave a 'owl that was dreadful to listen to, and then 'e pushed the conjurer away and started undressing 'imself as fast as he could move 'is fingers. I believe he'd ha' taken off 'is shirt if it 'ad 'ad pockets in it, and then 'e stuck 'is feet close to-

gether and 'e kept jumping into the air, and coming down on to 'is own clothes in his hobnailed boots.

"He *ain't* fond o' dumb animals, then," ses the conjurer. Then he put his 'and on his 'art and bowed.

"Gentlemen all," he ses. "'Aving given you this specimen of wot I can do, I beg to give notice that with the landlord's kind permission I shall give my celebrated conjuring entertainment in the tap-room this evening at seven o'clock; ad—mission, threepence each."

They didn't understand 'im at fust, but at last they see wot 'e meant, and arter explaining to Bill, who was still giving little jumps, they led 'im up into a corner and coaxed 'im into dressing 'imself agin. He wanted to fight the conjurer, but 'e was that tired 'e could scarcely stand, and by-and-by Smith, who 'ad said 'e wouldn't 'ave anything to do with it, gave way and said he'd risk it.

The tap-room was crowded that night, but we all 'ad to pay threepence each—coining money, I call it. Some o' the things wot he done was very clever, but a'most from the fust start-off there was unpleasantness. When he asked somebody to lend 'im a pocket-'andkercher to turn into a white rabbit, Henery Walker rushed up and lent 'im 'is, but instead of a white rabbit it turned into a black one with two white spots on it, and arter Henery Walker 'ad sat for some

time puzzling over it 'e got up and went off 'ome without saying good-night to a soul.

Then the conjurer borrowed Sam Jones's hat, and arter looking into it for some time 'e was that surprised and astonished that Sam Jones lost 'is temper and asked 'im whether he 'adn't seen a hat afore.

"Not like this," ses the conjurer. And 'e pulled out a woman's dress and jacket and a pair o' boots. Then 'e took out a pound or two o' taters and some crusts o' bread and other things, and at last 'e gave it back to Sam Jones and shook 'is head at 'im, and told 'im if he wasn't very careful he'd spoil the shape of it.

Then 'e asked somebody to lend 'im a watch, and, arter he 'ad promised to take the greatest care of it, Dicky Weed, the tailor, lent 'im a gold watch wot 'ad been left 'im by 'is great-aunt when she died. Dicky Weed thought a great deal o' that watch, and when the conjurer took a flat-iron and began to smash it up into little bits it took three men to hold 'im down in 'is seat.

"This is the most difficult trick o' the lot," ses the conjurer, picking off a wheel wot 'ad stuck to the flat-iron. "Sometimes I can do it and sometimes I can't. Last time I tried it it was a failure, and it cost me eighteenpence and a pint o' beer afore the gentleman the watch 'ad belonged to was satisfied. I gave 'im the bits, too."

"If you don't give me my watch back safe and sound," ses Dicky Weed, in a trembling voice, "it'll cost you twenty pounds."

"'Ow much?" ses the conjurer, with a start. "Well, I wish you'd told me that afore you lent it to me. Eighteenpence is my price."

He stirred the broken bits up with 'is finger and shook his 'ead.

"I've never tried one o' these old-fashioned watches afore," he ses. "'Owever, if I fail, gentlemen, it'll be the fust and only trick I've failed in to-night. You can't expect everything to turn out right, but if I do fail this time, gentlemen, I'll try it agin if anybody else'll lend me another watch."

Dicky Weed tried to speak but couldn't, and 'e sat there, with 'is face pale, staring at the pieces of 'is watch on the conjurer's table. Then the conjurer took a big pistol with a trumpet-shaped barrel out of 'is box, and arter putting in a charge o' powder picked up the pieces o' watch and rammed them in arter it. We could hear the broken bits grating agin the ramrod, and arter he 'ad loaded it 'e walked round and handed it to us to look at.

"It's all right," he ses to Dicky Weed; "it's going to be a success; I could tell in the loading."

He walked back to the other end of the room and held up the pistol.

"I shall now fire this pistol," 'e ses, "and in so

doing mend the watch. The explosion of the powder makes the bits o' glass join together agin; in flying through the air the wheels go round and round collecting all the other parts, and the watch as good as new and ticking away its 'ardest will be found in the coat-pocket o' the gentleman I shoot at."

He pointed the pistol fust at one and then at another, as if 'e couldn't make up 'is mind, and none of 'em seemed to 'ave much liking for it. Peter Gubbins told 'im not to shoot at 'im because he 'ad a 'ole in his pocket, and Bill Chambers, when it pointed at 'im, up and told 'im to let somebody else 'ave a turn. The only one that didn't flinch was Bob Pretty, the biggest poacher and the greatest rascal in Claybury. He'd been making fun o' the tricks all along, saying out loud that he'd seen 'em all afore—and done better.

"Go on," he ses; "I ain't afraid of you; you can't shoot straight."

The conjurer pointed the pistol at 'im. Then 'e pulled the trigger and the pistol went off bang, and the same moment o' time Bob Pretty jumped up with a 'orrible scream, and holding his 'ands over 'is eyes danced about as though he'd gone mad.

Everybody started up at once and got round 'im, and asked 'im wot was the matter; but Bob didn't answer 'em. He kept on making a dreadful noise, and at last 'e broke out of the room and, holding 'is

'andkercher to 'is face, ran off 'ome as 'ard as he could run.

"You've done it now, mate," ses Bill Chambers to the conjurer. "I thought you wouldn't be satisfied till you'd done some 'arm. You've been and blinded pore Bob Pretty."

"Nonsense," ses the conjurer. "He's frightened, that's all."

"Frightened!" ses Peter Gubbins. "Why, you fired Dicky Weed's watch straight into 'is face."

"Rubbish," ses the conjurer; "it dropped into 'is pocket, and he'll find it there when 'e comes to 'is senses."

"Do you mean to tell me that Bob Pretty 'as gone off with my watch in 'is pocket?" screams Dicky Weed.

"I do," ses the other.

"You'd better get 'old of Bob afore 'e finds it out Dicky," ses Bill Chambers.

Dicky Weed didn't answer 'im; he was already running along to Bob Pretty's as fast as 'is legs would take 'im, with most of us follering behind to see wot 'appened.

The door was fastened when we got to it, but Dicky Weed banged away at it as 'ard as he could bang, and at last the bedroom winder went up and Mrs. Pretty stuck her 'ead out.

"*H'sh!*" she ses, in a whisper. "Go away."

"I want to see Bob," ses Dicky Weed.
"You can't see 'im," ses Mrs. Pretty. "I'm get-

"He was running along to Bob Fretty's as fast as 'is legs would take 'im."

ting 'im to bed. He's been shot, pore dear. Can't you 'ear 'im groaning?"

We 'adn't up to then, but a'most direckly arter she

'ad spoke you could ha' heard Bob's groans a mile away. Dreadful, they was.

"There, there, pore dear," ses Mrs. Pretty.

"Shall I come in and 'elp you get 'im to bed?" ses Dicky Weed, 'arf crying.

"No, thank you, Mr. Weed," ses Mrs. Pretty. "It's very kind of you to offer, but 'e wouldn't like any hands but mine to touch 'im. I'll send in and let you know 'ow he is fust thing in the morning."

"Try and get 'old of the coat, Dicky," ses Bill Chambers, in a whisper. "Offer to mend it for 'im. It's sure to want it."

"Well, I'm sorry I can't be no 'elp to you," ses Dicky Weed, "but I noticed a rent in Bob's coat and, as 'e's likely to be laid up a bit, it ud be a good opportunity for me to mend it for 'im. I won't charge 'im nothing. If you drop it down I'll do it now."

"Thankee," ses Mrs. Pretty; "if you just wait a moment I'll clear the pockets out and drop it down to you."

She turned back into the bedroom, and Dicky Weed ground 'is teeth together and told Bill Chambers that the next time he took 'is advice he'd remember it. He stood there trembling all over with temper, and when Mrs. Pretty came to the winder agin and dropped the coat on his 'ead and said that Bob felt his kindness very much, and he 'oped Dicky ud make a good job of it, because it was 'is fav-rite coat

he couldn't speak. He stood there shaking all over till Mrs. Pretty 'ad shut the winder down agin, and then 'e turned to the conjurer, as 'ad come up with the rest of us, and asked 'im wot he was going to do about it now.

"I tell you he's got the watch," ses the conjurer, pointing up at the winder. "It went into 'is pocket. I saw it go. He was no more shot than you were. If 'e was, why doesn't he send for the doctor?"

"I can't 'elp that," ses Dicky Weed. "I want my watch or else twenty pounds."

"We'll talk it over in a day or two," ses the conjurer. "I'm giving my celebrated entertainment at Wickham Fair on Monday, but I'll come back 'ere to the Cauliflower the Saturday before and give another entertainment, and then we'll see wot's to be done. I can't run away, because in any case I can't afford to miss the fair."

Dicky Weed gave way at last and went off 'ome to bed and told 'is wife about it, and listening to 'er advice he got up at six o'clock in the morning and went round to see 'ow Bob Pretty was.

Mrs. Pretty was up when 'e got there, and arter calling up the stairs to Bob told Dicky Weed to go upstairs. Bob Pretty was sitting up in bed with 'is face covered in bandages, and he seemed quite pleased to see 'im.

"It ain't everybody that ud get up at six o'clock

to see 'ow I'm getting on," he ses. "You've got a feeling 'art, Dicky."

Dicky Weed coughed and looked round, wondering whether the watch was in the room, and, if so, where it was hidden.

"Now I'm 'ere I may as well tidy up the room for you a bit," he ses, getting up. "I don't like sitting idle."

"Thankee, mate," ses Bob; and 'e lay still and watched Dicky Weed out of the corner of the eye that wasn't covered with the bandages.

I don't suppose that room 'ad ever been tidied up so thoroughly since the Prettys 'ad lived there, but Dicky Weed couldn't see anything o' the watch, and wot made 'im more angry than anything else was Mrs. Pretty setting down in a chair with 'er 'ands folded in her lap and pointing out places that he 'adn't done.

"You leave 'im alone," ses Bob. "*He knows wot 'e's arter.* Wot did you do with those little bits o' watch you found when you was bandaging me up, missis?"

"Don't ask me," ses Mrs. Pretty. "I was in such a state I don't know wot I was doing 'ardly."

"Well, they must be about somewhere," ses Bob. "You 'ave a look for 'em, Dicky, and if you find 'em, keep 'em. They belong to you."

Dicky Weed tried to be civil and thank 'im, and

then he went off 'ome and talked it over with 'is wife agin. People couldn't make up their minds whether Bob Pretty 'ad found the watch in 'is pocket and was shamming, or whether 'e was really shot, but they was all quite certain that, whichever way it was, Dicky Weed would never see 'is watch agin.

On the Saturday evening this 'ere Cauliflower public-'ouse was crowded, everybody being anxious to see the watch trick done over agin. We had 'eard that it 'ad been done all right at Cudford and Monksham; but Bob Pretty said as 'ow he'd believe it when 'e saw it, and not afore.

He was one o' the fust to turn up that night, because 'e said 'e wanted to know wot the conjurer was going to pay him for all 'is pain and suffering and having things said about 'is character. He came in leaning on a stick, with 'is face still bandaged, and sat right up close to the conjurer's table, and watched him as 'ard as he could as 'e went through 'is tricks.

"And now," ses the conjurer, at last, "I come to my celebrated watch trick. Some of you as wos 'ere last Tuesday when I did it will remember that the man I fired the pistol at pretended that 'e'd been shot and run off 'ome with it in 'is pocket."

"You're a liar!" ses Bob Pretty, standing up.

"Very good," ses the conjurer; "you take that bandage off and show us all where you're hurt."

"I shall do nothing o' the kind," ses Bob. "I don't take my orders from you."

"Take the bandage off," ses the conjurer, "and if there's any shot marks I'll give you a couple o' sovereigns."

"I'm afraid of the air getting to it," ses Bob Pretty.

"You don't want to be afraid o' that, Bob," ses John Biggs, the blacksmith, coming up behind and putting 'is great arms round 'im. "Take off that rag, somebody; I've got hold of 'im."

Bob Pretty started to struggle at fust, but then, seeing it was no good, kept quite quiet while they took off the bandages.

"*There!* look at 'im," ses the conjurer, pointing. "Not a mark on 'is face, not one."

"*Wot!*" ses Bob Pretty. "Do you mean to say there's no marks?"

"I do," ses the conjurer.

"Thank goodness," ses Bob Pretty, clasping his 'ands. "Thank goodness! I was afraid I was disfigured for life. Lend me a bit o' looking-glass, somebody. I can 'ardly believe it."

"You stole Dicky Weed's watch," ses John Biggs. "I 'ad my suspicions of you all along. You're a thief, Bob Pretty. That's wot you are."

"Prove it," ses Bob Pretty. "You 'eard wot the conjurer said the other night, that the last time he

tried 'e failed, and 'ad to give eighteenpence to the man wot the watch 'ad belonged to."

"That was by way of a joke like," ses the conjurer to John Biggs. "I can always do it. I'm going to do it now. Will somebody 'ave the kindness to lend me a watch?"

He looked all round the room, but nobody offered —except other men's watches, wot wouldn't lend 'em.

"Come, come," he ses; "ain't none of you got any trust in me? It'll be as safe as if it was in your pocket. I want to prove to you that this man is a thief."

He asked 'em agin, and at last John Biggs took out 'is silver watch and offered it to 'im on the understanding that 'e was on no account to fire it into Bob Pretty's pocket.

"Not likely," ses the conjurer. "Now, everybody take a good look at this watch, so as to make sure there's no deceiving."

He 'anded it round, and arter everybody 'ad taken a look at it 'e took it up to the table and laid it down.

"Let me 'ave a look at it," ses Bob Pretty, going up to the table. "I'm not going to 'ave my good name took away for nothing if I can 'elp it."

He took it up and looked at it, and arter 'olding it to 'is ear put it down agin.

"Is that the flat-iron it's going to be smashed with?" he ses.

"It is," ses the conjurer, looking at 'im nasty like; "p'r'aps you'd like to examine it."

Bob Pretty took it and looked at it.

"Afore anybody could move, he brought it down bang on the face o' the watch."

"Yes, mates," he ses, "it's a ordinary flat-iron. You couldn't 'ave anything better for smashing a watch with."

He 'eld it up in the air and, afore anybody could move, brought it down bang on the face o' the watch. The conjurer sprang at 'im and caught at 'is arm, but it was too late, and in a terrible state o' mind 'e turned round to John Biggs.

"He's smashed your watch," he ses; "he's smashed your watch."

"Well," ses John Biggs, "it 'ad got to be smashed, 'adn't it?"

"Yes, but not by 'im," ses the conjurer, dancing about. "I wash my 'ands of it now."

"Look 'ere," ses John Biggs; "don't you talk to me about washing your 'ands of it. You finish your trick and give me my watch back agin same as it was afore."

"Not now he's been interfering with it," ses the conjurer. "He'd better do the trick now as he's so clever."

"I'd sooner 'ave you do it," ses John Biggs. "Wot did you let 'im interfere for?"

"'Ow was I to know wot 'e was going to do?" ses the conjurer. "You must settle it between you now. I'll 'ave nothing more to do with it."

"All right, John Biggs," ses Bob Pretty; "if 'e won't do it, I will. If it can be done, I don't s'pose it matters who does it. I don't think anybody could smash up a watch better than that."

John Biggs looked at it, and then 'e asked the conjurer once more to do the trick, but 'e wouldn't.

"It can't be done now," he ses; "and I warn you that if that pistol is fired I won't be responsible for what'll 'appen."

"George Kettle shall load the pistol and fire it if 'e won't," ses Bob Pretty. "'Aving been in the Militia, there couldn't be a better man for the job."

George Kettle walked up to the table as red as fire at being praised like that afore people and started loading the pistol. He seemed to be more awkward about it than the conjurer 'ad been the last time, and he 'ad to roll the watch-cases up with the flat-iron afore 'e could get 'em in. But 'e loaded it at last and stood waiting.

"Don't shoot at me, George Kettle," ses Bob. "I've been called a thief once, and I don't want to be agin."

"Put that pistol down, you fool, afore you do mischief," ses the conjurer.

"Who shall I shoot at?" ses George Kettle, raising the pistol.

"Better fire at the conjurer, I think," ses Bob Pretty; "and if things 'appen as he says they will 'appen, the watch ought to be found in 'is coat-pocket."

"Where is he?" ses George, looking round.

Bill Chambers laid 'old of 'im just as he was going through the door to fetch the landlord, and the scream 'e gave as he came back and George Kettle pointed the pistol at 'im was awful.

"The scream 'e gave as George Kettle pointed the pistol at 'im was awful."

"Don't be silly," ses George. "Nobody's going to hurt you."

"It's no worse for you than it was for me," ses Bob.

"Put it down," screams the conjurer; "put it down. You'll kill 'arf the men in the room if it goes off."

"Be careful where you aim, George," ses Sam Jones. "P'r'aps he'd better 'ave a chair all by hisself in the middle of the room."

It was all very well for Sam Jones to talk, but the conjurer wouldn't sit on a chair by 'imself. He wouldn't sit on it at all. He seemed to be all legs and arms, and the way 'e struggled it took four or five men to 'old 'im.

"Why don't you keep still?" ses John Biggs. "George Kettle'll shoot it in your pocket all right. He's the best shot in Claybury."

"Help! Murder!" says the conjurer, struggling. "He'll kill me. Nobody can do the trick but me."

"But you say you won't do it," ses John Biggs.

"Not now," ses the conjurer; "I can't."

"Well, I'm not going to 'ave my watch lost through want of trying," ses John Biggs. "Tie 'im to the chair, mates."

"All right, then," ses the conjurer, very pale. "Don't tie me; I'll sit still all right if you like, but you'd better bring the chair outside in case of accidents. Bring it in the front."

George Kettle said it was all nonsense, but the conjurer said the trick was always better done in the open

air, and at last they gave way and took 'im and the chair outside.

"Now," ses the conjurer, as 'e sat down, "all of you go and stand near the man wot's going to shoot. When I say 'Three,' fire. Why! there's the watch on the ground there!"

He pointed with 'is finger, and as they all looked down he jumped up out o' that chair and set off on the road to Wickham as 'ard as 'e could run. It was so sudden that nobody knew wot 'ad 'appened for a moment, and then George Kettle, wot 'ad been looking with the rest, turned round and pulled the trigger.

There was a bang that pretty nigh deafened us, and the back o' the chair was blown nearly out. By the time we'd got our senses agin the conjurer was a'most out o' sight, and Bob Pretty was explaining to John Biggs wot a good job it was 'is watch 'adn't been a gold one.

"That's wot comes o' trusting a foreigner afore a man wot you've known all your life," he ses, shaking his 'ead. "I 'ope the next man wot tries to take my good name away won't get off so easy. I felt all along the trick couldn't be done; it stands to reason it couldn't. I done my best, too."

ADMIRAL PETERS

WILL OWEN

ADMIRAL PETERS

MR. GEORGE BURTON, naval pensioner, sat at the door of his lodgings gazing in placid content at the sea. It was early summer, and the air was heavy with the scent of flowers; Mr. Burton's pipe was cold and empty, and his pouch upstairs. He shook his head gently as he realised this, and, yielding to the drowsy quiet of his surroundings, laid aside the useless pipe and fell into a doze.

He was awakened half an hour later by the sound of footsteps. A tall, strongly built man was approaching from the direction of the town, and Mr. Burton, as he gazed at him sleepily, began to wonder where he had seen him before. Even when the stranger stopped and stood smiling down at him his memory proved unequal to the occasion, and he sat staring at the handsome, shaven face, with its little fringe of grey whisker, waiting for enlightenment.

"George, my buck," said the stranger, giving him a hearty slap on the shoulder, "how goes it?"

"D—— *Bless* my eyes, I mean," said Mr. Bur-

ton, correcting himself, "if it ain't Joe Stiles. I didn't know you without your beard."

"That's me," said the other. "It's quite by accident I heard where you were living, George; I offered to go and sling my hammock with old Dingle for a week or two, and he told me. Nice quiet little place, Seacombe. Ah, you were lucky to get your pension, George."

"I deserved it," said Mr. Burton, sharply, as he fancied he detected something ambiguous in his friend's remark.

"Of course you did," said Mr. Stiles; "so did I, but I didn't get it. Well, it's a poor heart that never rejoices. What about that drink you were speaking of, George?"

"I hardly ever touch anything now," replied his friend.

"I was thinking about myself," said Mr. Stiles. "I can't bear the stuff, but the doctor says I must have it. You know what doctors are, George!"

Mr. Burton did not deign to reply, but led the way indoors.

"Very comfortable quarters, George," remarked Mr. Stiles, gazing round the room approvingly; "ship-shape and tidy. I'm glad I met old Dingle. Why, I might never ha' seen you again; and us such pals, too."

His host grunted, and from the back of a small cup-

board produced a bottle of whisky and a glass, and set them on the table. After a momentary hesitation he found another glass.

"Our noble selves," said Mr. Stiles, with a tinge of reproach in his tones, "and may we never forget old friendships."

Mr. Burton drank the toast. "I hardly know what it's like now, Joe," he said, slowly. "You wouldn't believe how soon you can lose the taste for it."

Mr. Stiles said he would take his word for it. "You've got some nice little public-houses about here, too," he remarked. "There's one I passed called the Cock and Flowerpot; nice cosy little place it would be to spend the evening in."

"I never go there," said Mr. Burton, hastily. "I —a friend o' mine here doesn't approve o' public-'ouses."

"What's the matter with him?" inquired his friend, anxiously.

"It's—it's a 'er," said Mr. Burton, in some confusion.

Mr. Stiles threw himself back in his chair and eyed him with amazement. Then, recovering his presence of mind, he reached out his hand for the bottle.

"We'll drink her health," he said, in a deep voice. "What's her name?"

"Mrs. Dutton," was the reply.

Mr. Stiles, with one hand on his heart, toasted her feelingly; then, filling up again, he drank to the "happy couple."

"She's very strict about drink," said Mr. Burton, eyeing these proceedings with some severity.

"Any—dibs?" inquired Mr. Stiles, slapping a pocket which failed to ring in response.

"She's comfortable," replied the other, awkwardly. "Got a little stationer's shop in the town; steady, old-fashioned business. She's chapel, and very strict."

"Just what you want," remarked Mr. Stiles, placing his glass on the table. "What d'ye say to a stroll?"

Mr. Burton assented, and, having replaced the black bottle in the cupboard, led the way along the cliffs toward the town some half-mile distant, Mr. Stiles beguiling the way by narrating his adventures since they had last met. A certain swagger and richness of deportment were explained by his statement that he had been on the stage.

"Only walking on," he said, with a shake of his head. "The only speaking part I ever had was a cough. You ought to ha' heard that cough, George!"

Mr. Burton politely voiced his regrets and watched him anxiously. Mr. Stiles, shaking his head over a somewhat unsuccessful career, was making a bee-line for the Cock and Flowerpot.

"Just for a small soda," he explained, and, once

inside, changed his mind and had whisky instead. Mr. Burton, sacrificing principle to friendship, had one with him. The bar more than fulfilled Mr. Stiles's ideas as to its cosiness, and within the space of ten minutes he was on excellent terms with the regular clients. Into the little, old-world bar, with its loud-ticking clock, its Windsor-chairs, and its cracked jug full of roses, he brought a breath of the bustle of the great city and tales of the great cities beyond the seas. Refreshment was forced upon him, and Mr. Burton, pleased at his friend's success, shared mildly in his reception. It was nine o'clock before they departed, and then they only left to please the landlord.

"Nice lot o' chaps," said Mr. Stiles, as he stumbled out into the sweet, cool air. "Catch hold—o' my—arm, George. Brace me—up a bit."

Mr. Burton complied, and his friend, reassured as to his footing, burst into song. In a stentorian voice he sang the latest song from comic opera, and then with an adjuration to Mr. Burton to see what he was about, and not to let him trip, he began, in a lumbering fashion, to dance.

Mr. Burton, still propping him up, trod a measure with fewer steps, and cast uneasy glances up the lonely road. On their left the sea broke quietly on the beach below; on their right were one or two scattered cottages, at the doors of which an occasional

figure appeared to gaze in mute astonishment at the proceedings.

"Dance, George," said Mr. Stiles, who found his friend rather an encumbrance.

"*Hs'h! Stop!*" cried the frantic Mr. Burton, as he caught sight of a woman's figure bidding farewell in a lighted doorway.

Mr. Stiles replied with a stentorian roar, and Mr. Burton, clinging despairingly to his jigging friend lest a worse thing should happen, cast an imploring glance at Mrs. Dutton as they danced by. The evening was still light enough for him to see her face, and he piloted the corybantic Mr. Stiles the rest of the way home in a mood which accorded but ill with his steps.

His manner at breakfast next morning was so offensive that Mr. Stiles, who had risen fresh as a daisy and been out to inhale the air on the cliffs, was somewhat offended.

"You go down and see her," he said, anxiously. "Don't lose a moment; and explain to her that it was the sea-air acting on an old sunstroke."

"She ain't a fool," said Mr. Burton, gloomily.

He finished his breakfast in silence, and, leaving the repentant Mr. Stiles sitting in the doorway with a pipe, went down to the widow's to make the best explanation he could think of on the way. Mrs. Dutton's fresh-coloured face changed as he entered

the shop, and her still good eyes regarded him with scornful interrogation.

"I—saw you last night," began Mr. Burton, timidly.

"I saw you, too," said Mrs. Dutton. "I couldn't believe my eyesight at first."

"It was an old shipmate of mine," said Mr. Burton. "He hadn't seen me for years, and I suppose the sight of me upset 'im."

"I dare say," replied the widow; "that and the Cock and Flowerpot, too. I heard about it."

"He would go," said the unfortunate.

"*You* needn't have gone," was the reply.

"I 'ad to," said Mr. Burton, with a gulp; "he—he's an old officer o' mine, and it wouldn't ha' been discipline for me to refuse."

"Officer?" repeated Mrs. Dutton.

"My old admiral," said Mr. Burton, with a gulp that nearly choked him. "You've heard me speak of Admiral Peters?"

"*Admiral?*" gasped the astonished widow. "What, a-carrying on like that?"

"He's a reg'lar old sea-dog," said Mr. Burton. "He's staying with me, but of course 'e don't want it known who he is. I couldn't refuse to 'ave a drink with 'im. I was under orders, so to speak."

"No, I suppose not," said Mrs. Dutton, softening. "Fancy him staying with you!"

"He just run down for the night, but I expect he'll be going 'ome in an hour or two," said Mr. Burton, who saw an excellent reason now for hastening his guest's departure.

Mrs. Dutton's face fell. "Dear me," she murmured, "I should have liked to have seen him; you have told me so much about him. If he doesn't go quite so soon, and you would like to bring him here when you come to-night, I'm sure I should be very pleased."

"I'll mention it to 'im," said Mr. Burton, marvelling at the change in her manner.

"Didn't you say once that he was uncle to Lord Buckfast?" inquired Mrs. Dutton, casually.

"Yes," said Mr. Burton, with unnecessary doggedness; "I did."

"The idea of an admiral staying with you!" said Mrs. Dutton.

"Reg'lar old sea-dog," said Mr. Burton again; "and, besides, he don't want it known. It's a secret between us three, Mrs. Dutton."

"To be sure," said the widow. "You can tell the admiral that I shall not mention it to a soul," she added, mincingly.

Mr. Burton thanked her and withdrew, lest Mr. Stiles should follow him up before apprised of his sudden promotion. He found that gentleman, however, still sitting at the front door, smoking serenely.

"I'll stay with you for a week or two," said Mr. Stiles, briskly, as soon as the other had told his story. "It'll do you a world o' good to be seen on friendly terms with an admiral, and I'll put in a good word for you."

Mr. Burton shook his head. "No, she might find out," he said, slowly. "I think that the best thing is for you to go home after dinner, Joe, and just give 'er a look in on the way, p'r'aps. You could say a lot o' things about me in 'arf an hour."

"No, George," said Mr. Stiles, beaming on him kindly; "when I put my hand to the plough I don't draw back. It's a good speaking part, too, an admiral's. I wonder whether I might use old Peters's language."

"Certainly not," said Mr. Burton, in alarm. "You don't know how particular she is."

Mr. Stiles sighed, and said that he would do the best he could without it. He spent most of the day on the beach smoking, and when evening came shaved himself with extreme care and brushed his serge suit with great perseverance in preparation for his visit.

Mr. Burton performed the ceremony of introduction with some awkwardness; Mr. Stiles was affecting a stateliness of manner which was not without distinction; and Mrs. Dutton, in a black silk dress and the cameo brooch which had belonged to her

mother, was no less important. Mr. Burton had an odd feeling of inferiority.

"It's a very small place to ask you to, Admiral Peters," said the widow, offering him a chair.

"Mr. Stiles was affecting a stateliness of manner which was not without distinction."

"It's comfortable, ma'am," said Mr. Stiles, looking round approvingly. "Ah, you should see some of the palaces I've been in abroad; all show and no

comfort. Not a decent chair in the place. And, as for the antimacassars——"

"Are you making a long stay, Admiral Peters?" inquired the delighted widow.

"It depends," was the reply. "My intention was just to pay a flying visit to my honest old friend Burton here—best man in my squadron—but he is so hospitable, he's been pressing me to stay for a few weeks."

"But the admiral says he *must* get back to-morrow morning," interposed Mr. Burton, firmly.

"Unless I have a letter at breakfast-time, Burton," said Mr. Stiles, serenely.

Mr. Burton favoured him with a mutinous scowl.

"Oh, I do hope you will," said Mrs. Dutton.

"I have a feeling that I shall," said Mr. Stiles, crossing glances with his friend. "The only thing is my people; they want me to join them at Lord Tufton's place."

Mrs. Dutton trembled with delight at being in the company of a man with such friends. "What a change shore-life must be to you after the perils of the sea!" she murmured.

"Ah!" said Mr. Stiles. "True! True!"

"The dreadful fighting," said Mrs. Dutton, closing her eyes and shuddering.

"You get used to it," said the hero, simply. "Hottest time I had I think was at the bombardment of

Alexandria. I stood alone. All the men who hadn't been shot down had fled, and the shells were bursting round me like—like fireworks."

The widow clasped her hands and shuddered again.

"I was standing just behind 'im, waiting any orders he might give," said Mr. Burton.

"Were you?" said Mr. Stiles, sharply—"were you? I don't remember it, Burton."

"Why," said Mr. Burton, with a faint laugh, "I was just behind you, sir. If you remember, sir, I said to you that it was pretty hot work."

Mr. Stiles affected to consider. "No, Burton," he said, bluffly—"no; so far as my memory goes I was the only man there."

"A bit of a shell knocked my cap off, sir," persisted Mr. Burton, making laudable efforts to keep his temper.

"That'll do, my man," said the other, sharply; "not another word. You forget yourself."

He turned to the widow and began to chat about "his people" again to divert her attention from Mr. Burton, who seemed likely to cause unpleasantness by either bursting a blood-vessel or falling into a fit.

"My people have heard of Burton," he said, with a slight glance to see how that injured gentleman was progressing. "He has often shared my dangers. We have been in many tight places together. Do you

remember those two nights when we were hidden in the chimney at the palace of the Sultan of Zanzibar, Burton?"

"I should think I do," said Mr. Burton, recovering somewhat.

"Stuck so tight we could hardly breathe," continued the other.

"I shall never forget it as long as I live," said Mr. Burton, who thought that the other was trying to make amends for his recent indiscretion.

"Oh, do tell me about it, Admiral Peters," cried Mrs. Dutton.

"Surely Burton has told you that?" said Mr. Stiles.

"Never breathed a word of it," said the widow, gazing somewhat reproachfully at the discomfited Mr. Burton.

"Well, tell it now, Burton," said Mr. Stiles.

"You tell it better than I do, sir," said the other.

"No, no," said Mr. Stiles, whose powers of invention were not always to be relied upon. "You tell it; it's your story."

The widow looked from one to the other.

"It's your story, sir," said Mr. Burton.

"No, I won't tell it," said Mr. Stiles. "It wouldn't be fair to you, Burton. I'd forgotten that when I spoke. Of course, you were young at the time, still——"

"I done nothing that I'm ashamed of, sir," said Mr. Burton, trembling with passion.

"I think it's very hard if I'm not to hear it," said Mrs. Dutton, with her most fascinating air.

Mr. Stiles gave her a significant glance, and screwing up his lips nodded in the direction of Mr. Burton.

"At any rate, you were in the chimney with me, sir," said that unfortunate.

"Ah!" said the other, severely. "But what was I there for, my man?"

Mr. Burton could not tell him; he could only stare at him in a frenzy of passion and dismay.

"What *were* you there for, Admiral Peters?" inquired Mrs. Dutton.

"I was there, ma'am," said the unspeakable Mr. Stiles, slowly—"I was there to save the life of Burton. I never deserted my men—never. Whatever scrapes they got into I always did my best to get them out. News was brought to me that Burton was suffocating in the chimney of the Sultan's favourite wife, and I——"

"*Sultan's favourite wife!*" gasped Mrs. Dutton, staring hard at Mr. Burton, who had collapsed in his chair and was regarding the ingenious Mr. Stiles with open-mouthed stupefaction. "Good gracious! I—I never heard of such a thing. I *am* surprised!"

"So am I," said Mr. Burton, thickly. "I—I——"

"How did you escape, Admiral Peters?" inquired

the widow, turning from the flighty Burton in indignation.

Mr. Stiles shook his head. "To tell you that would be to bring the French Consul into it," he said, gently. "I oughtn't to have mentioned the subject at all. Burton had the good sense not to."

The widow murmured acquiescence, and stole a look at the prosaic figure of the latter gentleman which was full of scornful curiosity. With some diffidence she invited the admiral to stay to supper, and was obviously delighted when he accepted.

In the character of admiral Mr. Stiles enjoyed himself amazingly, his one regret being that no discriminating theatrical manager was present to witness his performance. His dignity increased as the evening wore on, and from good-natured patronage of the unfortunate Burton he progressed gradually until he was shouting at him. Once, when he had occasion to ask Mr. Burton if he intended to contradict him, his appearance was so terrible that his hostess turned pale and trembled with excitement.

Mr. Burton adopted the air for his own use as soon as they were clear of Mrs. Dutton's doorstep, and in good round terms demanded of Mr. Stiles what he meant by it.

"It was a difficult part to play, George," responded his friend. "We ought to have rehearsed it a bit. I did the best I could."

"Best you could?" stormed Mr. Burton. "Telling lies and ordering me about?"

"I had to play the part without any preparation, George," said the other, firmly. "You got yourself into the difficulty by saying that I was the admiral in the first place. I'll do better next time we go."

Mr. Burton, with a nasty scowl, said that there was not going to be any next time, but Mr. Stiles smiled as one having superior information. Deaf first to hints and then to requests to seek his pleasure elsewhere, he stayed on, and Mr. Burton was soon brought to realise the difficulties which beset the path of the untruthful.

The very next visit introduced a fresh complication, it being evident to the most indifferent spectator that Mr. Stiles and the widow were getting on very friendly terms. Glances of unmistakable tenderness passed between them, and on the occasion of the third visit Mr. Burton sat an amazed and scandalised spectator of a flirtation of the most pronounced description. A despairing attempt on his part to lead the conversation into safer and, to his mind, more becoming channels only increased his discomfiture. Neither of them took any notice of it, and a minute later Mr. Stiles called the widow a "saucy little baggage," and said that she reminded him of the Duchess of Marford.

"I *used* to think she was the most charming woman in England," he said, meaningly.

Mrs. Dutton simpered and looked down; Mr. Stiles moved his chair a little closer to her, and then glanced thoughtfully at his friend.

"Mr. Stiles called the widow a 'saucy little baggage.'"

"Burton," he said.

"Sir," snapped the other.

"Run back and fetch my pipe for me," said Mr. Stiles. "I left it on the mantelpiece."

Mr. Burton hesitated, and, the widow happening to look away, shook his fist at his superior officer.

"Look sharp," said Mr. Stiles, in a peremptory voice.

"I'm very sorry, sir," said Mr. Burton, whose wits were being sharpened by misfortune, "but I broke it."

"Broke it?" repeated the other.

"Yes, sir," said Mr. Burton. "I knocked it on the floor and trod on it by accident; smashed it to powder."

Mr. Stiles rated him roundly for his carelessness, and asked him whether he knew that it was a present from the Italian Ambassador.

"Burton was always a clumsy man," he said, turning to the widow. "He had the name for it when he was on the *Destruction* with me; 'Bungling Burton' they called him."

He divided the rest of the evening between flirting and recounting various anecdotes of Mr. Burton, none of which were at all flattering either to his intelligence or to his sobriety, and the victim, after one or two futile attempts at contradiction, sat in helpless wrath as he saw the infatuation of the widow. They were barely clear of the house before his pent-up emotions fell in an avalanche of words on the faithless Mr. Stiles.

"I can't help being good-looking," said the latter, with a smirk.

"Your good looks wouldn't hurt anybody," said

Mr. Burton, in a grating voice; "it's the admiral business that fetches her. It's turned 'er head."

Mr. Stiles smiled. "She'll say 'snap' to my 'snip' any time," he remarked. "And remember, George, there'll always be a knife and fork laid for you when you like to come."

"I dessay," retorted Mr. Burton, with a dreadful sneer. "Only as it happens I'm going to tell 'er the truth about you first thing to-morrow morning. If I can't have 'er you sha'n't."

"That'll spoil your chance, too," said Mr. Stiles. "She'd never forgive you for fooling her like that. It seems a pity neither of us should get her."

"You're a sarpent," exclaimed Mr. Burton, savagely—"a sarpent that I've warmed in my bosom and——"

"There's no call to be indelicate, George," said Mr. Stiles, reprovingly, as he paused at the door of the house. "Let's sit down and talk it over quietly."

Mr. Burton followed him into the room and, taking a chair, waited.

"It's evident she's struck with me," said Mr. Stiles, slowly; "it's also evident that if you tell her the truth it might spoil my chances. I don't say it would, but it might. That being so, I'm agreeable to going back without seeing her again by the six-forty train to-morrow morning if it's made worth my while."

"Made worth your while?" repeated the other.

"Certainly," said the unblushing Mr. Stiles. "She's not a bad-looking woman—for her age—and it's a snug little business."

Mr. Burton, suppressing his choler, affected to ponder. "If 'arf a sovereign—" he said, at last.

"Half a fiddlestick!" said the other, impatiently. "I want ten pounds. You've just drawn your pension, and, besides, you've been a saving man all your life."

"Ten pounds?" gasped the other. "D'ye think I've got a gold-mine in the back garden?"

Mr. Stiles leaned back in his chair and crossed his feet. "I don't go for a penny less," he said, firmly. "Ten pounds and my ticket back. If you call me any more o' those names I'll make it twelve."

"And what am I to explain to Mrs. Dutton?" demanded Mr. Burton, after a quarter of an hour's altercation.

"Anything you like," said his generous friend. "Tell her I'm engaged to my cousin, and our marriage keeps being put off and off on account of my eccentric behaviour. And you can say that that was caused by a splinter of a shell striking my head. Tell any lies you like; I shall never turn up again to contradict them. If she tries to find out things about the admiral, remind her that she promised to keep his visit here secret."

For over an hour Mr. Burton sat weighing the

advantages and disadvantages of this proposal, and then—Mr. Stiles refusing to seal the bargain without—shook hands upon it and went off to bed in a state of mind hovering between homicide and lunacy.

He was up in good time next morning, and, returning the shortest possible answers to the remarks of Mr. Stiles, who was in excellent feather, went with him to the railway station to be certain of his departure.

It was a delightful morning, cool and bright, and, despite his misfortunes, Mr. Burton's spirits began to rise as he thought of his approaching deliverance. Gloom again overtook him at the booking-office, where the unconscionable Mr. Stiles insisted firmly upon a first-class ticket.

"Who ever heard of an admiral riding third?" he demanded, indignantly.

"But they don't know you're an admiral," urged Mr. Burton, trying to humour him.

"No; but I feel like one," said Mr. Stiles, slapping his pocket. "I've always felt curious to see what it feels like travelling first-class; besides, you can tell Mrs. Dutton."

"I could tell 'er that in any case," returned Mr. Burton.

Mr. Stiles looked shocked, and, time pressing, Mr. Burton, breathing so hard that it impeded his utterance, purchased a first-class ticket and conducted him

to the carriage. Mr. Stiles took a seat by the window, and lolling back put his foot up on the cushions

"'Good riddance,' said Mr. Burton, savagely."

opposite. A large bell rang and the carriage-doors were slammed.

"Good-bye, George," said the traveller, putting his head to the window. "I've enjoyed my visit very much."

"Good riddance," said Mr. Burton, savagely.

Mr. Stiles shook his head. "I'm letting you off easy," he said, slowly. "If it hadn't ha' been for one little thing I'd have had the widow myself."

"What little thing?" demanded the other, as the train began to glide slowly out.

"My wife," said Mr. Stiles, as a huge smile spread slowly over his face. "Good-bye, George, and don't forget to give my love when you go round."